

## IT, Take Three by HarryTrumanWilson

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**Relationships:** Ben Hanscom/Beverly Marsh, Bill Denbrough & Mike Hanlon, Bill Denbrough/Beverly Marsh, Eddie Kaspbrak & Stanley Uris, Eddie Kaspbrak/Richie Tozier, Mike Hanlon/Stamley Uris

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**Summary:**

Pennywise, killed by losers as children and adults in both the 1950s and 1980s timelines, is granted one more opportunity. Except, this time, he is able to make a few subtle changes to give himself a distinct advantage. Now, as children in 1989, the losers must face their toughest challenge yet. (M because Richie cusses like a sailor.)

# 1. In the Multiverse

## Author's Note:

Hey, hope you enjoy this story! I've written other Stranger Things stuff, but this is my first IT story. The new movie was fine, but I really love these characters, so here we go! Comments and Kudos are welcome.

It was dead. Or as dead as it could be. Pennywise the Clown, menace of Derry for over a millennium, killed by a bunch of kids. Then, killed again, once and for all, by grown up versions of those kids. Hell, it wasn't even all of them. It had used nearly all of its energy to cause Stanley Uris to kill himself. And then, nearly everything left to get Henry Bowers to hurt Mike Hanlon long enough to isolate him from the others. And still, it wasn't enough. It had been overwhelmed by the others, and now, here it was, out in the Multiverse, with no sense of anything. A ghost maybe...though It had once been a ghost, to terrify the children of Derry. And that thing was more corporeal than he was now. Or ever would be. This was the punishment. It had come as like a meteor down to earth and now, it was gone from the planet again, like as not, never to return.

In fact, It's death had happened more than once. It didn't understand it, though It never really tried. And now, it didn't matter, because It was dead. But, it had fought the children four times. The first was in an earlier time, where the children were born in an era after the destructive Second World War. Those children, and the adults later, had beaten It with the ritual...Chud...the ritual of the stupid Turtle. The Turtle should have been dead, should have choked on its only galactic vomit, but instead, it gave the children what they needed... even as adults, and so, It was dead.

The second time was later, in another era, of violence and disruption, of the greatest threats to the people of Derry, Maine, fading in the collapse of a place called the Soviet Union. And in that year, It had faced children who hadn't even heard of that stupid, dead Turtle, and still...the children did the Chud and defeated It. And they did it again, using some Native American version of the ritual as adults...

and killed It. And so...It...was dead.

Maybe it was that both time strings led to the same place. History was known to be obdurate, after all, and tended toward similar paths. But, It didn't care of course. Because there was nothing it could do in this state. Floating in the multiverse...floating without being, no understanding of its surrounding...no true place...no place...

*It...*

It stirred. Something was happening. A sound, or maybe a being was reaching for It. Something of great power. Something like...like...that stupid...

*It...see me...*

There was suddenly blinding light, then It had a form again, the enormous, horrible face of its clown form. The same terror It had tried to use to kill Bill Denbrough. And yet...the face was soon dwarfed by something enormous. The thing was hairless, a long, pink snake-like thing curling around the face, sliding through nothingness and moving with a sense of urgency despite that, to It, the thing seemed to be endless.

*It...you...are dead...* It finally turned the face and moved the eyes to follow the thing, which it now understood to be a tail, until It was looking into the dark black eyes of the head of a rat. Not just any rat, It knew, this was the guardian, Chuchundra. The rat tilted his head slightly, flipping his wide black ears and shifting his body to shake his thick coat of fur. Chuchundra opened his mouth, revealing two sets of long, sharpened incisors that clicked together twice before he spread his jaw wide, exposing the dark, dank opening that lead deeper to his throat. And, like the record players of the Derry that had been Its home, words simply started to project from the opening.

*It...you have lost...and you are dead...* the Rat explained, then slowly moved one of his paws, with big, hairless pink fingers, clenched the thing into a fist, then opened it again, *But...you don't have to be.* The creature's paw opened and closed again, then he lowered his head and signaled to the clown with a twitch of the ugly round spot on its face that was its nose.

*I can help you...return you...to your previous form, not here or now, but a certain earlier time and place, with all the knowledge and experience you possess...*

*Useless...It surprised itself somewhat, that It could answer the creature in this void but It continued nonetheless, The result will be the same...they will destroy me...as they always have...*

*You have lost to them in two time strings, two dimensions, but, in the rat hole I create...a time string may appear which could save you. And my brothers...*

*Brothers? The other guardians...like the stupid Turtle! Or the ugly Fish or the terrible Lion or the meddlesome Eagle...*

*This is the arrangement, The Rat's great tail slid around Its form, and started wrapping around It a second time, and It began to suspect that there wasn't a way to escape this offer, You will be transported through the hole I create in space-time. And as you go, you will make changes...small, reasonable, modifications that will not cause instability, but will give you the advantage...Then, you will return to a time in Derry and try again against the children. When—or better if—you win, you will return to me here, in the multiverse and help me restore the beams...by adjusting that history to prevent the death of the other guardians.*

*Fine...I will protect the other guardians...But...if I lose to the brats anyway...or if I cannot return to you here...*

*You will be in no worse state than now...and I will have lost nothing but a small bit of energy...but, if you succeed against the children, and do not return to me and save my brethren you believe are stupid or ugly or terrible, I will cause my rat tunnel to collapse, trapping you in my time string and erasing you from history.... It supposed as much, but It didn't care. Because once it had a form again...once the "loser" club was destroyed once and for all, even this sneaky, foolish Rat couldn't do anything to It.*

*Then...I will go...and do as you say, It expressed. The face of the clown, of Pennywise faded, and soon, It felt its form shifting, into something more soul or spirit like. The Rat's clawed paws began to move quickly, digging the hole into the multiverse, and suddenly, It*

was in it, falling backward into time, becoming stronger and stronger and stronger. More real, more corporeal. After what was only a few minutes, or maybe a few moments, It was alive. It was powerful, and only getting stronger, and soon, it gained a new ability...and that mean, this time, it would destroy the children once and for all...

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There was the slow creaking of the crank. It began with mostly metal on rust, scratching where the crank met the gears. Then, the sound of the music box began to make the loud noises of the famous *Carousel*, the sounds of a carnival, of a loving and caring clown. There were wind pipes that screamed, cymbals that crashed, and slowly, the curtain on of the stage was drawn back to reveal the star of this show, Pennywise the Clown.

“Ladies and Gentleman! Welcome, to this great performance!” Pennywise yelled, jumping onto the stage and holding up his arms in excitement. He turned to wave to the many audience members of his show, the many people who would witness his great comeback...and this bloody, but oh so fun, circus act, “May I present, the story of *It, Take Three*...ha-ha-ha!” Pennywise collapsed into laughter, then took a few haunting steps back and was suddenly above the stage. He opened his hands, and strings appeared, tied to his fingers, and connected to the puppets now sitting on the stage. Pennywise began to cackle, then his back burst open with a thunderous and ugly sounding rip, and another hand appeared, with another set of strings that connected to new puppet. This was followed by another tear, then more, until there were six arms from Pennywise, and then, with a loud twist and crack of its right leg, it suddenly had a seventh appendage to grip it from. Each wielded puppet strings, and finally, seven puppets bounced jerkily onto the stage.

“Featuring,” Pennywise began again through another loud cackle, “*The Losers Club*! It might surprise you to learn, however, that this club isn’t quite as you remember it...” Pennywise moved a hand, and manipulated one puppet to move forward, a pale child with brown bangs that slicked over his face and a scrawny form that jerked violently at Pennywise’s direction..

“This is the fearless leader, Bill Denbrough, brave boy, with a little

bit of a st-st-st-stutter. A stutter, that gave him strength, used to spit out bad poetry to get over the condition. Wouldn't it be a shame if the poems were meaningless, because he doesn't have a stutter..." Pennywise started to move Bill's mouth quickly, and it began to move effortlessly and with no difficulty. Pennywise gave a big grin, then used another hand to move a young girl with short hair, a tight dress and certain spunk forward. She was followed by another boy, wild black hair, thick glasses, and an oversized mouth on his face.

"And here, we have Beverly Marsh. Tough girl, gonna show Daddy who's boss. Not gonna be pushed around...and this is Richie Tozier, a loud mouthed boy with a bad attitude and even worse at making accents, but, he's good enough to give my tongue a hard bite. Let's see if we can mellow these two out..." Pennywise danced the two together, then began to spin Beverley, "Bev here might not be so tough...if it wasn't her daddy, but her momma who was the old grump around the house...maybe she'd even show a little class..." Beverly's hair grew out, and her dress lengthened and became looser, "Now Richie here...he's best buds with Bill here, he'd do near anything for him...unless of course, Bill did something unforgivable one summer, and...well, look at the torment on the boy's face..." Richie's puppet turned and shoved Bill's back, then he, Beverley and Bill puppets moved to the side, and two other puppets stepped forward, one was a short, fat boy, the other a skinny, small one with a broken arm and small cast around it.

"This is Ben Hanscom, and this is Eddie Kaspbrak. Now, Ben, he's a big boy, real smart, good reader and a clear loser, because of the poor fella's weight. And Eddie, oh, Eddie, his mother is a bit of a hypochondriac. Sends her poor boy to get pills out the wazoo, but they don't do nothing, not really! Those sad features give both them strength, so, let's make a small change. Ben, a bit less fat, a bit more muscle, and maybe books won't mean so much, and Eddie, well, if he really had a disease, lets say...diabetes. Makes for a different tale, don't you think?" Ben's shape changed dramatically, his arms and shoulders growing big while his stomach tightened into abs, while Eddie gripped his abdomen and appeared rather pained. Pennywise moved them aside, and brought forward two more, a young, strong looking black boy and a thin, skinny boy with orderly, though curly, hair.

“And this is Michael Hanlon and Stanley Uris, our diversity hires... Mike here is black and Stan here is a Jew. Mike’s family owns a farm, though, its not clear what happened to his dad, who taught him so much about life. Did he die of old age, as happened back in the fifties, or was he burned up with his mother, as happened in the 80s? How about we...split the baby. Daddy Hanlon will burn, all by himself, when Mike’s a baby, then, he’ll be raised by a distraught mother and abusive grandfather... makes for an easily disturbed boy I’d say...and Stan...Stan was the most afraid. Even killable in old age, fucking sad-sap. But, how high will his screams go...if I made the boy a sissy?” Mike’s puppet was surrounded by fire that it fell back and drew away from, while Stan’s clasped its hands together and looked away. Pennywise let out another loud cackle, then the music began to play louder and louder.

“Now, ladies and gentlemen, sit back, and enjoy the show...” Pennywise laughs, then presses one hand against the edge of the story, turning to look directly at you, the reader of this piece.

“We’re going to put our story in the 80s, more fun and horror to work with, you see, and our boys are gonna be the ripe young age of 12 when this begins...” Pennywise’s round, red nose starts to push against these words, giving you a shiver. You see him, his powdered face, his haunting yellow eyes...It is visible for just a moment in your screen...or is it?

“I hope you’re not expecting our brave heroes to win as they did in the past, or even live through this story...where would the fun in that be?” Pennywise roars with laughter, right at you as a reader, then falls backward, laughing so hard that he slips back into the house at 29 Neibolt Street, just in time for Bill Denbrough, leading the Loser’s Club, to open the front door with a long, low creaking noise.

*And now...our story will begin...he-he-he, ha-ha-ha!*

## 2. House on Neibolt Street

### Summary for the Chapter:

Here is the first section, dealing with this timeline in the house on Neibolt street. Hope you enjoy. Comments and Kudos always welcome.

Bill took a deep breath, and then pointed his flashlight into the house. It was really dark, despite missing most of the glass on the windows, and in some sense, it seemed exactly like what Bill imagined an abandoned house would be. There were the broken remains of living room furniture in one room, a doorway that probably led to a kitchen, another that led to a bathroom, and two sets of stairs, one heading up, the other going down. Bill tried to consider the layout, think of a plan for searching the home. Looking for..."IT." That thing, that weird, evil, clown creature that had killed his brother...that had tortured him and the members of the Losers Club that stood behind him. He was going to find It, and he was going to kill It, no matter what.

"Okay..." Bill started, taking a deep breath, then looking back at his motley crew. Beverly, wearing a long, white and blue dress, the wind blowing her long, straight and neat brown hair, was standing on the steps leading to the house. But the other five boys were standing further back. Richie, unsurprisingly, was giving Bill a dark look through his thick glasses. He had his arms crossed and his body language was suggesting he would refuse to move and was mad about the same shit as always. Further back, Eddie and Stan were standing near the gate on the edge of the old home. Neither seemed rather interested in moving forward, though Eddie seemed less likely to take off running. Finally, the two new boys, Ben and Mike, were closer, but still seemed hesitant to follow Bill onto the steps. Ben probably would, the strong, well-shaped boy, a wrestler and track star who'd been at their school for only a year, had been incredibly kind and helpful to Bill and the Losers, despite his ease in joining "popular" kids. Mike would probably too. Bill had heard stories from his mother about what blacks did and were known to have done, assumptions about being lazy, threatening, and stupid, but Mike



hadn't proven any of them true. In fact, Mike seemed to be nearly as friendly and obliging as Ben was. No matter what anyone else did, however, Bill knew, in fact, felt in his heart, that he had to go into that house and face the creature. Face the thing that had taken Georgie. Face the thing...that had killed his brother.

Thus, Bill was about to take a step into the house by himself when Stan shouted suddenly.

"Wait! Wait! Before we..." Stan hesitated, then gripped a rung on the iron gate and seemed unable to move forward, "Before we go... shouldn't somebody keep watch...out here...just in case something bad happens..." Bill, as well as the others, all looked at the scrawny Jewish boy. Stan crossed a foot and began digging in the heel, his eyes downcast, as though he knew he was being a coward. Bill knew well that he couldn't help it, but, he nonetheless felt himself growing irritated with his effeminate and easily terrified friend.

"Goddamned chicken..." Bill muttered under his breath, then cleared his throat, "Who wants to stay out here then?" Bill's heart dropped as everyone except Ben raised their hands. The others looked at each other, then at Ben, who shrugged.

"I'm not afraid of a goddamned clown or his red balloons...I'm also not stupid enough to follow those balloons down gym hallways..." Ben grumbled, "I won't fall for any tricks in there..." Bill sighed, then looked at Richie, who gave him a sour look. *Now Richie?* Bill thought, *Are you going to make our shared fight with a clown about...about that?*

"Well, I personally am not convinced Bill is the best leader for this mission. Frankly, I think I'd rather follow Ben. I be thinking hesa much better leader, eh, hombre?" Richie switched to his terrible, flat Mexican accent, and was about to continue when Eddie, whose irritation with Richie had caused him to brave the lawn of the Neibolt house, jabbed Richie with an angry finger.

"Beep-beep Richie!" Eddie said, repeating the Loser club's normal way of shutting up their friend, "We're not having a vote on leadership. We're deciding who's going in and who gets to stay out... And there's only one fair way to do it..." Eddie leaned down to the grass of the lawn slowly, groaning slightly through what sounded to

Bill like abdominal pain. Soon, he had found six sticks, and he broke three to make them shorter, "Four in, three out...assuming you're going either way Bill..."

"Yeah...I am. And three of you should be enough backup...But I'm doing this for Georgie...if one of you...doesn't care or isn't..." Bill began, then trailed off. After a moment, Ben cleared his throat.

"We're here to face the clown. We knew what that could mean..." Ben said. Beverly nodded in support, as did Mike and Richie, who agreed in another offensively bad accent, this time doing his "clever Frenchman".

"Oh ho, yes, zat is very good, we-we!"

"Beep-beep, Richie!" Bill spat. He looked at Stan, who was still gripping the fence tightly. The curly haired boy didn't look up at Bill with more than a glance, but he nodded slowly anyway. Eddie went to him first, and Stan let out a long sigh of relief as he held up a long stick. Bill let out an equally long sigh when Beverly picked out a long stick as well. Mike was not as lucky, drawing a short stick he flung on the ground.

"God-dammit!" Mike spat. He shook his head, then Stan held out a hand to him.

"Be careful," Stan said.

"Yeah, yeah I will be," Mike responded. Bill looked at Mike, and remembered that he and Stan knew each other. After Mike's father burned up in a fire, his mother had started working at Derry general, the same hospital where Stan's father was a part-time chaplain. Or whatever the Jewish equivalent of a chaplain was. That was part of why Mike had run to the Losers in the barrens, trying to flee from Henry Bowers. He'd seen Stan and Stan had seen him. And Mike had careened toward them as quick as he could, to hide behind Stan of all people.

Ben got lucky too, drawing a long stick, which got both Richie and Eddie cursing loudly.

“Fuck Eddie!” Richie roared. Eddie looked at him, then down at his hand, which held two short sticks.

“Fuck Richie!”

“Come on you two!” Bill ordered, “And you, Mike!” Eddie and Richie began pushing each other forward, but Mike stepped past them both and went to stand next to Bill at the doorway.

“Are you scared?” Bill asked.

“Nothing worse than I’ve seen on my granddad’s farm...or in my nightmares.”

“Right...” Bill said, “Nothing worse than my nightmares about my brother either...”

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“I can’t believe you handed me a short straw Eddie! You should be glad we aren’t measuring dick sizes...” Richie groaned. And really, he couldn’t believe it. Because, against all odds, he was following Bill Denbrough into an evil, haunted house to fight a fucking clown. Bill Denbrough! And a fucking clown! He hated clowns! If they were in a movie, he would’ve called his character a goddamn idiot.

“Shut-up Richie!” Eddie spat in his high squeaky voice. He looked no more happy to end up with a short straw himself. Nor did Mike.

“I’d have to agree...Richie. Beep-beep,” Mike said. Richie groaned, then started to follow Bill and Mike as they moved slowly through the house’s main hallway, but he stopped short when his eye was drawn to something. A piece of paper, in the remains of what appeared to be a tree that had grown in through a window. It was in a room that might have been a parlor once. Richie hesitated, causing Eddie to stop short behind him, then moved toward the paper. He felt it calling to him. The goddamn paper. This house was going to kill him.

“Richie no! You’re going the wrong way!” Eddie called. Richie ignored this shrill, and moved toward the paper, feeling a mix of terror and disbelief. Because it couldn’t be. It just couldn’t be. He

wasn't missing...not yet anyway...but the paper, the paper he reached out and grabbed...it was him. An image of him, with the clear name, *Richard Tozier*, printed beneath it. He could see his big, round glasses, his thick lips, oversized compared to his skinny nose, and his bangs that slipped down into his eyes when he sweated or his hair got wet.

"Guys!" Richie started, starting to shake as he held the paper, "Guys...It says I'm missing...I'm lost! I'm not missing! I'm not!"

"Richie!" Bill called, stepping back from the hallway toward Richie, "You're not missing..."

"No..." Richie gulped, then started reading the paper, "Police department, city of Derry, that's my shirt, that's my hair, that my face!" Richie looked over the paper again, at his image, scared and alone and missing, left by his friends...especially...

"Bill Denbrough..." a voice, from who the fuck knows where, whispered in his ear, "That son of a bitch..."

"Richie! It's not real!" Bill called. He took a step toward Richie, but Richie jerked away from him.

"That's my name, that's my age, that's the date!"

"That son of a bitch...he just wants you to tough it out..." the voice whispered, then continued, "He doesn't really care about you...he just wants to use you, Richie. He doesn't care...he didn't last summer...and he doesn't now..." though creepy as shit, the voice had a good point, and Richie, now gave the approaching Bill a cold, angry glare, and pulled away from him again. Richie was on the verge of cursing him out, when a small, pale hand gripped his wrist. Richie felt the paper of his image ripped away, then turned to see Eddie was holding it.

"Look at me, Richie!" Eddie squeaked. He threw the paper on the ground, then grabbed Richie's other wrist, looking him in the eye, "That...it's not real. It's playing tricks on you. The clown is just trying to scare you Richie..."

"I...I..." Richie felt himself starting to calm down, but then, the voice returned.

"What's wrong Richie...you don't have an accent for this? Some stupid phrase you could use, to tell Bill or Eddie off? He-he...you're a lot weaker than before, boy..." the voice whispered, then faded. It was only then that Richie recognized that it had to be the clown whispering to him.

"Shit..." Richie muttered, then stamped on the paper on the ground and signaled forward, "Stupid clown...let's go..."

"Hmph...Richie..." Bill muttered, then, he, Richie and Eddie turned to Mike, then upward, to the sound of somebody, a girl probably, saying something. A quiet call, like she was confused and trapped somewhere...

"I think...that's one of the missing girls..." Bill said, starting forward. Eddie hesitated, and Richie put an arm around him as they walked.

"Come on, Eds, let's get a move on, wot-wot...Wouldn't want to be left behind, cheerio, and all that..." Richie switched to a British accent he knew was no good. He and Eddie stepped back to the main hallway, where Bill and Mike at the bottom of the main stairway looking around and trying to determine where the voice was coming from, "Would be a shame to be left in an old scary manor, wot-wot..."

"Beep-beep man! Is this a record for you?" Bill spat. Richie stuck out his tongue, and Mike pinched his forehead.

"What have I got myself into..." Mike muttered. Richie was about to start his probably inappropriate Afro-American Jim accent when Eddie pushed past him and pointed.

"We have to go upstairs! Whatever it is, it's upstairs." The girl called out again, saying something that to Richie sounded an awful lot like a cry for help, then fell silent. Mike looked up the stairs, then back at Eddie.

"Why?" Mike asked. Bill held up a hand.

“Eddie’s got a knack for directions. He’s not led us wrong, as long as he feels where he’s going.”

“Yeah, Stan and I think he’s got a magnet in the gut. It gave him diabetes, but it also made him a human compass,” Richie agreed.

“Whatever Richie. I just know we need to go upstairs...” Eddie said. Mike rolled his eyes, then moved with Bill up the steps. Richie and Eddie followed, and each one creaked loudly, creating more stress and terror in the boy, but, after fifteen...or maybe fifty, they were on the second floor and moving to a hallway which ended in what was probably a bedroom. The door was partly open, and there, on the edge of his vision, Richie would’ve sworn he’d seen Betty Ripsom’s face dragged across the wooden floor. Swallowing terror, he followed Mike and Bill toward the doorway, and they opened the door to reveal a mostly empty room with old, partially torn mattress was against one wall. Behind the group, down the hallway, was another room, one that was very dark, and had a rather cold breeze coming from it.

“In there...” Eddie said. Bill nodded, then stepped into the room slowly, his eyes fixed on the horrible mattress. Richie could’ve guess a few things done on that mattress, and might’ve cracked a joke about it...if he wasn’t terrified out of his mind. Mike went through the door’s threshold slowly, then just before Richie could follow, he felt a knot tie in his stomach, and slowly turned around to see that the door of the far room was now swinging open slowly. Eddie, behind Richie, turned around too and quickly opened his fanny pack to pull out inhaler. Richie wasn’t totally clear on what the thing actually did, but Richie assumed it gave Eddie more oxygen to prevent his diabetes from killing him. Or maybe it just made the whiney sick boy calm down some. It didn’t seem to be doing anything at that moment, as Eddie was taking a long puff and still breathing very heavily.

“Guys...” Eddie started, “What is...” There was a loud giggle that then turned to a growl and suddenly, something enormous, fury, and with huge teeth and claws burst through the doorway.

“You got to be kidding me...” Eddie grumbled.

“Shit Eddie!” Richie yelled, “I thought you were scared of Lepers or something?”

“Werewolves...huh\*...are...are...a disease...puff\*...tur...tur...huh\*... turned into a monster!” Eddie struggled out through increasingly fast breathes and inhaler puffs. He took another hit of the inhaler, but to little effect. The werewolf stepped down the hallway slowly, stretching out its arms and shaking its fur before letting out a long, loud howl. It turned its snout to Eddie, bared its long, sharp fangs, then started bounding toward him. Richie stumbled backward and in a moment had fallen into the bedroom and onto the hard, wooden floor. Bill and Mike grabbed his shoulders, and sat him up to see the door of the bedroom shut suddenly. They could only hear the sound of Eddie screaming as Bill and Mike dropped Richie and rushed to grab the doorknob. The frantic shaking yielded nothing, and Richie stood as he heard the sound of Eddie’s cries of *guys, guys*, increasing in volume, then came a loud crash, like part of the house was falling in on itself.

“Eddie!” Richie yelled, rushing to the door and banging on it, “Eddie! Eddie!” Richie stumbled back, trying not to lose it. Eddie...Eddie couldn’t be dead. Maybe it was another trick. But, if it wasn’t Eddie... the werewolf...Richie refused to let his mind think about what might have happened to him. Eddie was his best friend...especially since Bill had...Eddie couldn’t be killed. Not by the fucking clown or werewolf or whatever it was. There had to be...

“Richie!” Eddie’s voice came from somewhere in the room. Behind him. Richie turned, and Mike put a hand on his shoulder.

“Step back, Richie, I’ll try to kick it open!” Mike said. Richie started away from him, moving toward the voice which repeated itself.

“Hey, Richie!” Eddie said again. Richie turned to see another door, a door out of the bedroom that opened slowly, and he caught a glimpse of Eddie moving behind a cupboard.

“Eddie! What the hell, man? We...I thought you were really hurt!” Richie trailed off and followed the boy into the next room...and then, a flashing light came on, and Richie knew immediately he’d made a mistake. All around him...were fucking clowns.

They weren't as bad as real clowns. They were dolls, of all many of sizes and shapes, but all of them had the same wild red hair, the bald head and white, powdered face, and a big red nose Richie would've liked to rip off of every one he saw. Richie sighed, then was about to turn around when the door to this side room slammed shut.

"Oh, boy..." Richie muttered, then looked back to see, in the far corner of the room, was a coffin. A boy sized coffin. A Richie sized coffin. Richie, pulled forward by morbid curiosity, moved slowly toward the box. It was a nice wood, and was a little low to the ground. Richie would be able to look directly into it. *That's the fucking point, you idiot!* he thought, then, very slowly, he reached out, and lifted the coffin's side open. And inside...was him. A doll of him, partially eaten by maggots, and more disgusting than terrifying.

"Gross..." Richie muttered. Then, his eyes was draw down the dead doll boy's body. Down, past his chest and his poorly fitting suit, to his pants. Because right down there, gripping doll boy's crotch, was a hand. A hand that squeeze hard, which Richie felt, and his hand flew down, but felt only his own shorts back from. Then, Richie went to the other side of the coffin and lifted it, and there, crouched around Richie's legs and with that hand on him, was Bill.

"Hey Richie. I got a joke for you. But don't tell anyone about it..." Bill said. Then, he started to undo the pants. Richie felt his own zipper and button coming undone, and started to stumble back, crying out.

"No! Stop, Bill! Stop!" Richie cried. Bill suddenly jumped up and landed next to the coffin, slowly walking toward Richie, smiling evilly. Richie could see his half decayed doll form rise up to, and smile in something he recognized as pleasure and excitement.

"It's just a little joke. A bit of fun...I won't tell your secret...and if somebody sees it...I won't turn on you...I won't call you, faggot boy...I won't join in with the others in beating and kicking you like the little bitch you are!"

"Bill! You...you..." Richie tried to do something. Cuss him out, use an accent, mock how he sometimes spoke overly eloquently. But...all Richie could do was choke out a sob, then he felt tears form and start



to slip down his face.

“Bill...why...I...I thought we were...” Richie felt his nose filling, and sniffed hard and wiped his eyes. Bill’s smile faded, then he clenched a fist.

“I need you scared, Richie. I need fear...not that sadness and those feeble tears...”

“Wh...What?” Richie struggled out through his unsteady breathes, trying to keep his vision clear of the rising water in his eyes. Bill’s face shook, then each arm stretched out in a terrible breaking sound. His legs did the same, and then he grabbed his head, and, making loud cracks, turned it all the way around. Richie watched in horror as the head kept turning, and by the time it got back around, it was white, powdered, with red hair and that stupid, nose.

“Beep-beep, Richie...” the clown said, then started to do a horrible dance, like it was on puppet strings but the head was stuck in place and wouldn’t move no matter how hard you jerked the body. Richie stepped back, trying to move away from the thing, but he just wasn’t as scared. His mind was too busy flashing through the memories of last summer. Trying not to cry again, he backed up slowly to the shut door, where he could hear Mike and Bill fighting with the handle. Then, the clown was on him, swinging out a hand, straight for Richie’s face. The boy jerked aside, into a corner he knew there was no escape from. The hand smashed through the door beside him, then the clown turned to him with a horrible, evil smile.

“Come on, Richie...let’s play...and maybe float...we all...huh?” The clown, interrupted, turned back to its hand, which was still through the door. Richie watched as the clown pulled, then the hand seemed to be pulled back, bringing the creature to the doorway. Richie looked at the increasingly stupid and silly looking clown struggling to get its hand free, then had an idea. Dolls, some dolls anyway, were made of porcelain, or something glass-like, right? He really hoped one of these clown dolls was, and grabbed the legs of a hefty one, with a sad, crying face and a tear painted badly on one cheek, raised it in the air, and brought it down on it. Though it seemed a bit light for Richie, the doll was apparently indeed made of porcelain, as it smashed into the head of the clown with a thud, broke against the

creature, and left a bit gash on its head. The clown stumbled back, then Richie ripped open the door and saw Mike and Bill standing there, holding a severed clown hand.

“Motherf...”

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Mike didn't hear the rest, because the hand, the severed hand with the white, frilly glove leading to a bloody stump, suddenly came to life from their fingers and covered Richie's mouth. The boy screamed through the hand, and Mike grabbed it to try and get it off, but Richie took off running, yelling and fighting against the horrible, severed thing. Both followed the boy, but Richie was already out of the room, and unsurprisingly, the door slammed behind him. Mike turned around and did his best to shut the door to the side room, though, it did little good, as the mattress in the middle of the bedroom started to whine and creak, and soon another of the white gloved hands burst from a rip in the seams.

“Oh, come on,” Mike said grumpily. Bill grabbed him and turned him around to see that the door Richie had run out of had multiplied. By three. Each door looked exactly the same, except that each something written in blood across it. The one on the far left said *Not Scary at All*, the middle said, *Scary*, and the last one said, *Very Scary*.

“Mike, let's try that one...” Bill pointed, and Mike did too, but they were facing opposite ways. Bill was facing the *Not Scary*, while Mike was facing *Very Scary*, “Mike, why would you...”

“It's a trick. And the door is where its suppose to be! I bet there's like half a girl hanging in that door...” Mike said. Bill looked him over, then at the *Very Scary* door.

“But, the werewolf is probably there...with...Eddie...” There was the sound of a loud rip, and both turned to see that the clown was halfway out of mattress, a bloody stump where his right arm should've been. They looked at each other, then Mike pointed at the middle.

“Compromise!” He yelled. Bill nodded and rushed to the door, flung

it open, and found it led to a long, narrow hallway that ended in a large window that illuminated the hallway with a low, ugly yellow light. They both rushed through it, then there was the sound of something breaking, as if something was shifting the entire house. Mike felt himself off balance, and started to fall forward. Bill started stumbling as well, then grabbed onto a column on the side of the room. Mike grabbed the other side, then, the yellow light became brighter, and darkened with redder and orange hues and finally the house seemed to shift entirely onto its side, and both Bill and Mike were hanging from the columns.

"This is the goddamn compromise..." Bill muttered. Mike looked at him, then back at the window, which burst from the heat, and soon was engulfed in flames. Flames that were traveling up toward them. Mike looked into it and saw his nightmare. The fire, the fire that had killed his father, scarred his grandfather, burned down his slaughterhouse and nearly killed him that night, it was coming for him again. He had joined this group because he was running from Henry Bowers, and he had been scared by the clown using a burning building before. Now, he was going to die from that same stupid clown because he let a couple of white boys convince him to go in a haunted, evil house. For Stanley Uris, maybe...for this Bill Denbrough...he didn't think so...

"Mike!" Bill said, looking at him, "Mike, the house can't be sideways, this is a trick!"

"I know. It still scares the shit out of me!" Mike yelled. Bill looked him over, then both heard the sound of old gears turning, except it was too fast and making the sound of something being torn apart. Mike and Bill looked down to see a meat grinder now in the middle of the flames, eating up furniture and debris falling from the houses new angle.

"Oh shit! Oh my god, oh, I'm gonna, die!" Bill said, now pulling his legs in, "I'm sorry, Mike! I'm sorry, Gerogie...Richie..I'm...I..." Mike looked at him, then down at the machine. It wasn't right. The grinder had gears, almost like a clock, a lot of them, moving fast, but that wouldn't grind meat. He worked on his grandfather's farm and sold meat to a butch for god's sake. But, why would the grinder look so wrong if it was going to kill them...unless, it was Bill's fear, like the

fire was for Mike.

“Bill! It’s not real!”

“I know, I just told you that!”

“But the grinder! I know what a grinder looks like! You don’t! It looks like what you think it does, but, its just a trick! We have to let go, or we’ll be caught by it!”

“What? Let go?” Bill looked down, then back at Mike, “Okay...okay, I trust you. But, if I get grinded up, I’m going to be a really racist ghost!” Mike let out a loud laugh, a laugh he could barely control, then looked down to see the grinder slowing down, and the flames weakening. *It’s working already.*

“Okay, ready? One...” Mike started. Bill joined in with *two*, then, they both screamed *three*, and dropped. Mike felt the sensation of flying, then sat down hard onto wood floor. No fire, not grinder. Just dusty wood floor, on the steps leading down toward a dining room. Bill had landed there too, and was rubbing his bum when they heard a scream. Really, a set of screams. Bill jumped to his feet and ran down the stairs, and soon they were in another hallway—*why is this house nothing but evil looking hallways*—that led to a kitchen. And both of them could see the vague outline of Eddie and Richie, drawing back from the werewolf, which was stepping slowly toward the two.

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“Wah! Ah!” Eddie screamed. He was about in the worse shape he’d ever been in. And he was a freaking diabetic. With diabetes-related asthma. And diabetes-related gastro-intestinal problems. And diabetes-related early onset heart disease. Hell, it seemed like his diabetes tried to kill him every day, but he’d never felt closer to death that with a werewolf stepping toward him with its teeth bared.

“Eddie! You got to get up! You got to run!” Richie yelled in his ear. *Run? I don’t think I can even move at all!* Eddie thought, looking at his right arm. It was broken, like really broken. As in, horror movie broken, because his hand was bent a different direction than the rest of his arm. And that was the least of his worries, wasn’t it? The

werewolf let out another howl, and Eddie though he was going to piss himself, then Richie jumped to his feet and put out his arms.

“Go away! Leave me friend alone!” Richie yelled. The werewolf looked at him, and snorted.

“Richie, no!” Eddie said, trying to signal him away. He was weak. And sickly. Eddie should’ve probably died years ago. But...he didn’t even want to imagine Richie dying, especially not to save him. Then again, he really wasn’t in any position to turn Richie’s help down, was he? He’d tried to run from the werewolf earlier, but passed out when the creature grabbed his arm and roared at him. Which led to him falling back, crashing through the floor, smashing into a table and breaking his arm in two. He was doing great, wasn’t he? Sure had his directions right, going upstairs for all that mess...

“Go away!” Richie said again. The werewolf let out a low growl, then both turned to the sound of Mike and Bill rushing toward them.

“Eddie!” Bill yelled. The werewolf let out a howl, then Bill and Mike started to stumble and struggled to move. As if they were both old drunks, like that old man who wandered his street sometimes at night and whistled for his mother. She would inevitably yell profanities back at him about staying away from her son. Then again, maybe it wasn’t the boys, but the hallway that was drunk, because it seemed to Eddie that the floor and the doorway were moving and keeping Mike and Bill from getting a good footing. Richie watched them a moment, then looked back at the werewolf, appearing a great deal less sure about himself, but he switched to one of Eddie’s least favorite Richie accents...Southern-bell Delilah.

“Oh my, now Snarly, why don’t you take that pretty face of yours with them great, big teeth and just get on! Get on, I say!” Richie said in as high and delicate a voice he could muster. Which was neither all that high, nor all that delicate. The creature let out a snort, then raised an arm.

“Richie...that voice sucked...” the werewolf said, then swiped at the boy, sending him careening through the kitchen. He crashed through a nearby screen door and rolled out of the house, leaving Eddie with nothing between him and the werewolf. He glanced back at the still

struggling Mike and Bill and gulped hard.

“Hey Eddie...you ready...to take your pill?” the werewolf growled out to him, then, opened a long, clawed hand and gripped Eddie’s shoulder, “I’ve got a disease you won’t recover from, Eds...” the werewolf said, leaning forward and sniffing right at Eddie’s neck, right where werewolves bite, or at least, Eddie assumed so. He cowered and whimpered as the creature opened its mouth to reveal not just one set of sharp, long white fangs, but two, then three sets. Eddie thought he saw something else too, some light that was bright and evil and ominous deep in the throat of the creature. Something that may have been called...*deadlights*...

As Eddie stared, in horror, in terror at the werewolf, he thought he should at least stop his uncontrollable wheezing, and reached his unbroken hand down to his fanny pack, unzipped it, and grabbed his inhaler. He picked it up slowly, but, instead of putting it in his mouth, something compelled him to lean forward and put it right into the mouth of the creature. The mouth was huge and the snout was not really shaped correctly to take in an inhaler, but, strangely enough, the werewolf clamped down on the thing. The creature, still in Eddie’s face, looked at boy in confusion, then at the thing in its mouth, letting out a small snort. Eddie, summoning all the power left in his unbroken hand, swung down as hard as he could at his inhaler and gave the creature a great burst of the medicine. It reeled back, coughing and spitting out the device and Eddie began to laugh again. Because it was so stupid. The werewolf took a hit of his asthma inhaler. Which meant, his lungs were clearing up. *Hope you breath better wolfie!* Eddie thought. Then, the werewolf did take a deep breath and sighed, almost like he was relieved.

“Thanks...Eds...” it said, giving Eddie a dark grin.

“I’m so dead...” Eddie muttered. He drew back as the werewolf opened its mouth, was about to clamp down on the boy, then, he saw a stake driven straight through its head. Eddie glanced up to see Beverly was holding the stake, driving it straight through the skull of the creature. It let out a low roar, then Eddie could see the muscular Ben behind her, also holding the same type of stake. And behind them, standing on the edge of the doorway, half in the house and halfway toward taking off running, was Stan, and even he was

holding one of these long sharp tools. Richie shoved past him, still seeming somewhat dazed, started toward Eddie, past the Beverly struggling with the impaled werewolf, and gripped the boy's shoulders.

"Eds I got to break your arm back into place..."

"What? No, I..." Richie gripped the wrist and jerked it before Eddie could say anything more, making a loud crunch that caused Eddie to scream loudly. The pain was horrible when he jerked it, but, now that it was back in place, it hurt a lot less, and also made him feel less nauseated by his own hand. Though, he started to feel lightheaded. He blinked a few times, and saw Beverly struggling to subdue the werewolf with the stake as he drifted toward passing out.

"Hold it still, Bev!" Ben yelled, raising his stake as well, "Let me help!" Eddie saw him raise and drive down the point, then his vision slipped to black.

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Stan didn't really know what he was doing there. Because this wasn't him. He was fighting an evil clown, the same clown who had pretended to be a misshapen woman from his father's worst painting. And he was fighting it in an old abandoned house full of dirt and grime and filth. Because Bill wanted revenge for his brother who was captured and killed by this thing the year before. This definitely was not him.

And that was why he did not want to get any closer to...what could only be described as a horribly human-like dog monster. Werewolves were not real. Paintings did not come to life. And clowns did not murder children. He wished he could believe that. But instead, he was standing, in one of his favorite button ups and slacks, watching Beverly and Ben stab a werewolf.

Stan took a deep breath and tried to think about what he'd do when they finally left that house. And finished killing the evil clown. Assuming he didn't piss himself and need a shower, Stan would probably prefer to switch genres, go watch something like *Dirty Dancing* or *Coming to America*, both of which he'd seen numerous

times. The romantic comedy was his favorite, but, of course, Richie and Bill loved stupid horror movies, and Eddie always seemed like more of an action flick guy. And it seemed like he was in a horror mixed with an action flick as he was watching a girl in a cute sky and cloud dress and a handsome, hulky boy stab a werewolf. Instead Stan would have preferred getting to dance in low moonlight with a pretty girl. *Or a pretty guy, but I can't admit that...* Stan sighed, and leaned on the stake, and wished, for just a moment, that he wasn't messed up like that...that he could think about the likes of Bill and Eddie and Mike there without his mind wandering down to their...

"Stan!" Beverly roared. Stan was snapped back to reality and looked at the girl, who's formerly well-manicured hair and nice dressed were being ruined by the creature she was impaling.

"Huh? What?"

"The stake, you idiot!" Beverly cried. She looked down and slammed a heavy foot on the werewolf's snout, "You need to stab it! If we all stab it, the thing will die! Werewolves are weak to bronze, so this should work! Just assume there is bronze in the stake..." Stan started to move forward, very slowly, to the writhing creature, then paused and looked up at Beverly.

"Bronze? Who told you that? Werewolves are killed by silver," Stan said. The writhing creature suddenly stopped, and Beverly looked down at the thing in horror.

"Shit...I wish you hadn't told her that..." Ben muttered. Stan could see the werewolf turn its head, and its lip curled slightly...into a *smile*.

"Beverly!" This came from Bill, who, with Mike, seemed to have made it down the wiggling hallway to get behind the thing. Stan looked over the two, and reflected for just a second how nice it would've been to be grabbed and rescued by those two boys...like Richie did to Eddie. Then again...

"Watch out!" Ben yelled. The big boy was flung back, then the werewolf flung Beverly back as well. The two of them crashed into an ancient cupboard together. The creature, obviously tired of the wolf



game, started to shake its head, and with a few jerky thrusts, had shifted back to the evil looking clown. Then, in a smooth move, it reached behind it, drew out the two stakes, and flung them, one flew sideways to smack into Bill and Mike's guts, knocking them down though, thankfully, not ripping open their abdomens. The other, going point first, nearly took off Richie's head, and crashed into an old pantry. The boy flinched, and collapsed to the ground, bringing the wounded Eddie down with him. The clown stood up slowly, cracked its neck, then turned to the last Loser standing, Stan, a big smile on his face.

"Hey Stan the Man...sissy boy...I bet you'd like a balloon..." Stan started to stumble backward, but stopped so he wouldn't fall out of the house. He couldn't abandon his friends, as much as he wanted to run.

"That's right Stan. No need to leave...it's fun to float...we all float down there..." the clown snapped, and a balloon appeared. A friendly, unthreatening balloon that slowly floated toward Stan. The balloon started to sound like it was straining, like it was getting too full, and it was almost touching Stan's face when it suddenly burst, with the loudest scream Stan had ever heard. The scream came with saliva, with bad breath, but it also came with something else. Gusts, bursts of wind...like...like a great evil bird. But Stan didn't fear birds. No, he loved birds, so that meant it had to be another flying creature. A creature he hated, that never, ever should've had the ability to fly.

"No...no..." Stan cowered from the enormous bat flapping over him. Except, this was the worst type of bat Stan could have ever imagined; huge, ugly fangs that stretched down to almost its chin, long, horribly misshapen claws for feet; dark, bugged out eyes; and big, black wings that slapped the air with quick, harsh flaps.

"Come on Stan...you don't want to float? How about we fly?"

"No, stop, please!" Stan was now almost in a ball, and he felt a warm liquid pooling around his crotch. The bat drew itself up, and opened its mouth to reveal numerous rows of the horrible teeth, but then it crashed to the ground. Stan, trying to control his shaking legs and hands, stood up and saw the bat flapping one wing on the ground, while the other had a stake in it. A stake, being driven in by Mike.

“Leave...him...alone!” Mike roared. The bat let out a whimper, then drew in one wing, and turned its body to orient toward Stan. The thing roared again, but, Stan felt a new conviction. He had to help Mike. He had to help Mike. He *had* to help Mike.

“Die bat!” Stan cried, snatching up the last stake and with an intense thrust, impaled the other wing. The clown-bat was now screaming, swinging both its wings against the stakes, crying in pain, and after a few moments, the wings ripped in bloody messes and the animal writhed and wiggled until it was racing away, down toward what looked to Stan like a cellar. Bill, who was dusting himself off, seemed to turn and chase after the thing. Stan watched him a moment, then his bravery faltered and he felt the formerly warm liquid on his pants cooling to a soggy mess. Stan stumbled backward, out of the house, then, he felt Mike grab his arm and lead him out to the lawn and their bikes, the others close behind him.

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“Ben! Help me with Eddie! He’s out cold!” Richie said, trying to drag Eddie out of the front door of the Neibolt house. Ben turned and nodded back to the boy.

“I’ve got him!” Ben, Big Ben as he was sometimes known, more for his great arms and big muscles than from any childish insult, gladly swept up the poor, sickly child and was carrying almost by himself when the Losers exited the house. Ben...well...he had to admit it was a surprise to be there and a surprise to be escaping. It was only his first year in Derry. And he’d meet some of these boys before, shoving Henry Bowers away when the boy tried to give Eddie a wedgie or Richie an overly tight noggie. He’d also once see Mike fleeing the Henry and his boys and tried to intervene but was too slow. Not until the boys had tried to cut a hole in Bill’s gut had Ben finally been able to teach the bullies a lesson. He’d kicked Bower’s man Vic, off a bridge and his other man, Belch, so hard in the nuts that he’d been unable to chase Bill or Ben. And soon, the two had escaped Bowers and Patrick Hockstetter before the latter had gone missing. But, Ben was probably there, more than anything else, for Beverly. And Ben looked back to make sure she was out of the house before he was.

Beverly...that beautiful, strong, brave girl who had sat in front of him

in English, who would go off on the other girls for their comments and attitudes with vulgar words and gestures, who was to Ben like a wonderful, shining light in the other dark and dreary Derry, Maine. He'd wrestled, a lot, with the idea of asking her out. Sure, he was a handsome and big boy, sure, but that didn't mean that the girl he liked would like him, especially a badass, independent girl like Bevie. And further, Ben didn't believe the slut rumors, nor the rumors about why her mother and her had come to Derry without a father. What would Beverly have thought of a new, handsome jock kid asking her out?

And then...after rescuing Bill, she was there, trying to clean his wound from tumbling with Bill down a hill toward the quarry. She remembered him, mentioned that he had a *New Kids on the Block* notebook that Ben was only somewhat embarrassed by, and Ben knew he was in the group, as much to protect Beverly as anything else.

Then...the rock fight with the bullies, Mike and Stan's showing them history books, the projector coming to life, and then, there they were in the Neibolt street house. And now, they seemed to have just barely escaped. The group, Stan, Mike, Richie, Beverly, and Ben, still holding Eddie, were panting and groaning in pain as they stood among the bikes outside of the fence of the home. Then, Bill came out last, looking over the wounded and exhausted Losers, then had the gall to turn around and signal back inside.

"Guys! I saw the well. And we hurt it! We all did!" Bill said, pointing back to the house, which only led the Losers to shy further away from it, "And if we come back, with enough equipment, we can kill it! We have to work together!"

"Work together? Come back?" Richie, one hand now on the unconscious Eddie, raised his other index finger accusingly at Bill, "Bill, that thing nearly killed us, all of us! Eddie's arm was fucking snapped in half. I was nearly eaten by a clown, then, I was nearly eaten when that clown turned into a werewolf, only to watch Stan be nearly eaten by a god-damned giant bat! And..." Richie's glare grew cold, like he was remember something that made him angry, "And...I was reminded by that clown that I don't really like you. So I don't really think we should be listening to blubbering Bill here!" Richie

spat. Bill put a hand to his head and sighed.

“Jesus...of course the clown would make that a thing with you, wouldn't it? Richie, I said I was sorry, I've tried to make it up a thousand times!”

“And it could take a thousand more! I don't forgive you Bill!” Richie shouted at him. Bill groaned, then, Mike stepped forward.

“Maybe...maybe we're not cut out for this...we're just kids. We just got through middle school...”

“And?” Beverly spoke up, her hands on her hips, “We're kids, and we're doing something. No one else will, we all know that...”

“Do we?” Richie challenged, then, he trailed off and looked at Eddie, who was coming back to consciousness.

“What...what happened?”

“A clown-werewolf broke your fucking arm by throwing you through the floor Eddie!” Richie said. Beverly rolled her eyes and looked at Mike, who now had his arms crossed grumpily.

“Mike, your father's history books. They showed you...that thing will come back every 27 years!”

“Yeah. Fine. I'll be forty, I'll be in an apartment somewhere in Florida, and I won't care,” Mike said with irritation. Bill was about to speak, when Stan cleared his throat.

“We...I need to go home...” Stan muttered, his hands down around his crotch, covering what to Ben looked like urine, “And...we can't do this again. No next time!”

“Stan's right! You're insane Bill!” Richie said, signaling to Stan's wet pants with a jerk of his hand, “Look at this motherfucker! He's got piss dripping down his leg because a giant bat nearly ripped his face off! And you want to come back? Your brother's dead, Bill and he's not coming back! This won't fix it!” This seemed to set off Bill, who walked up to Richie and looked him dead in the eye.

“Take that back, Richie...” Bill said, his face now cold. Richie and him were now inches from each other, but neither backed off.

“What are you going to do about it, Bill?” Richie started, “He’s dead. Georgie is dead. And nothing you do could ever bring him...” Richie didn’t get to finish, because Bill socked him in the face, sending him sprawling to the ground. Richie, on the ground, rolled for a moment, then jumped to his feet and rushed at Bill, slamming into him. The two shoved at each other until Stan and Mike grabbed Richie’s arms and Beverly grabbed Bill’s arm. Ben wanted to step in and intervene, but, holding the wounded Eddie, he hesitated to move too much.

“Stop! Stop, both of you!” Beverly yelled, pulling on Bill’s arm, “This is what it wants! We hurt it together! But if we separate...”

“If we separate, maybe we don’t die!” Richie spat back, “I don’t want to be part of this fucking Loser club anymore! Let’s go Eds, you can ride in there...” Richie pointed to the basket on Mike’s bike, “I’m borrowing this, home-school boy...” Mike sighed, then shrugged.

“Alright, trash-mouth. Guess I’ll just borrow yours then...” Mike grumbled.

“No...I can take you home...” Stan muttered, “Get on my bike... behind me. If...its...okay...with you.”

“Fine then. But I’ll need my bike back, Richie!” Mike slowly got onto Stan’s bike seat, and soon, the two of them took off in the direction of Mike’s farm. Ben very carefully put the wounded Eddie in Mike’s basket, then Richie rode off with him the opposite way, toward Eddie’s house. Soon, it was Bill, Beverly and Ben left.

“Ben, what are you going to do?” Beverly asked.

“Um...” Ben hesitated, trying to decide between his self-preservation and his desire to procreate with her in his answer, “I think that maybe...I’ll...”

“It doesn’t matter. The three of us alone aren’t strong enough...” Bill said. This came almost as if someone, or something far above Bill was speaking through him. The boy turned away from Ben and Beverly

and sighed, "If we grow too far apart, all of us...then it will be able to pick us off one by one..." Bill sighed, and turned from the group, "I failed Georgie...I don't think I can kill it..." Ben looked at Bill, rubbing a hand on one of his biceps. He just then noticed Beverly might find that suggestive or grotesque, and dropped it.

"Well, then maybe we shouldn't let the group get too far apart..." Ben offered.

"How...they won't listen to me," Bill muttered. Ben shrugged, but Beverly seemed to embrace this idea.

"No, Ben's right. We just need to keep in enough contact with each other to keep the group together. All seven. Mike and Stan will be together, and so will Eddie and Richie. If we can get one of each of them to spend time with one of us three, the group might hold enough," Bill glanced down, then looked back at Beverly.

"Great idea, Bevie. I'll just go beg Richie to hang out with me. That's going so well..."

"No, you idiot..." Beverly said, hands on her hips, "You try to get to Stan. Stan is irritated at you, and what was in there literally scared the piss out of him. But he doesn't hate you, and you two have know each other since kindergarten, right?" Bill nodded, then she looked at Ben, "Ben, you try and get Richie. Play games with him or something...Trashmouth has tried to start shit with everyone but you, so we should use that."

"Okay. I'll try..." Ben said. Bill crossed his arms.

"See if you can get Eddie too, though I doubt his mother will let him outside the house for the next three weeks. Bevie, you try for Mike. He might be willing to at least talk to you, since you helped save him in the rock-fight..."

"Right...I'll try..." Beverly said, "But, if any of us, any of the Losers are taken, we've got to get everyone back together. We've got to find a way. Otherwise...one of us might die. Like really die..." Both boys bobbed their heads in support, then Ben cleared his throat.

“Sounds good to me...” Ben pointed down Neibolt street, back toward downtown Derry, “Wanna go get milkshakes?” Ben knew it sounded stupid as soon as it came out of his mouth, and also knew any chance of getting with Beverly was contingent on her not picking Bill over him, which meant bringing Bill on the date was also stupid. But, Beverly let out a long, loud laugh, then put an arm around Bill and Ben and pull them close.

“That sounds wonderful boys. Let’s go...and I’ll let you all fight over which one of you will pay for me...” Ben smiled, then, something, something small felt like it was reconnected in the Losers.

### 3. Summer Days, 1989

#### Notes for the Chapter:

Hey, thanks for checking out my story! So, for the next two chapters, I have a story from each of the Losers perspectives. And, in this world, each of the Losers is actually trapped (mostly) in one of the seven stages of grief. Might be interesting to see if you can tell which one is which...

*No...no...they're stronger than they were before! The changes I made were supposed to break up the Loser's Club, not make it stronger! It murmurs, clicking its tongue, then turning its attention back to you, the reader, No matter though. I've got a special surprise for Bill and his friends. I'm not as defeated as they think...he-he-he. And this time Bill, nor Richie, nor any of that stupid Loser's Club will be able to escape the deadlights this time...he-he-he-he!*

In the two weeks since the incident at Neibolt street, Mike, returned by Stan to his grandfather's farm, tried to go back to life as it had been before. Tending to flocks of sheep, feeding pigs and letting the animals in and out of their pens, keeping foxes and dogs out of the hen house. But, he couldn't exactly go back to before because...he felt empty. Like there was a void that he couldn't quite put his finger on. He felt like something really important in his life was missing, and he didn't know what it was or how to fix it. When he'd been at Neibolt, he'd endured a lot of different feelings and emotions, especially fear and anger, but now...he was just numb. It kept Mike from saying more than a few words during dinner with his mother. It kept Mike from crying or even flinching in response to his grandfather's unprovoked bursts of anger. And, it took away his normal hesitation and dislike of killing animals. Which was why he was suddenly perfectly willing to take his captive bolt pistol and blow a hole into the skull of an unsuspecting ewe. Had Mike had a better understanding of psychology, he might've considered himself to be suffering the effects of emotional shock...though he had no grasp of this, and considered his lack of feelings as a void.

After the many days of this monotonous farm work, their family and



farm hands had gathered the meat of a few of the ewes they'd killed, and Mike was in the midst of wrapping some to take to the butcher, preparing to put them in his bike, when recalled that Richie had borrowed it and never returned it. Mike sighed in irritation at the uncouth boy and his failure to keep his promise, paused his work gathering meat, and went out from the cold house. He'd have to try to explain all this to his grandfather. He really hoped he wouldn't have to carry the meat all the way to the butcher, and prayed for a miracle to save him when he heard his name called.

"Mike!" the boy turned around, and saw Stan moving up the hill toward his farm slowly, pushing Mike's bike. And something in Mike clicked. The emptiness...it wasn't gone, exactly. But it wasn't as deep either. The void was beginning to fade. Mike's lips slipped into a smile at seeing the other boy's face.

"Stan..." Mike said. Stan paused a moment, and Mike could see the wind blowing his curls around his face. The sun was making his brown-blond hair particularly bright, and Stan was in his usual dapper clothing, a nice, neat white and blue polo shirt with khaki shorts and a tight belt that kept it in place.

"Mike..." Stan's face seemed to light up some too, and the boy pushed the bike over to Mike's side, "Richie...kept making excuses, so I just went over, took it from him and rode it out here..."

"I...thanks..." Mike said, taking the handles. Stan stood there, his hands at his sides, his head cocked slightly. Mike felt like he needed to say something, but, what was there to say?

"I...uh...well..."

"I guess I'll see you around..." Stan said, his smile fading. Mike's smile started to slip too and he sighed. The void was coming back, wasn't it?

"Yeah...thanks...for the bike..." Mike started, then he looked at his bike, then he looked back at Stan dubiously, "Wait, you rode up here? On this bike? How are you going home?" Stan turned his head, looked around, then shrugged.

"I...I guess I didn't really think of that. I don't know..." Stan said, then he looked at the sky again, "It's a nice day though. Not too buggy. I could probably walk home..."

"You wanna walk all that way?" Mike asked, then, he looked at the bike and smiled, "Here, come on. I got to deliver some meat to the butcher anyway. We'll ride into town together..." Stan smiled at this, and Mike felt the void starting to fade again as he led the bike and the boy over to the cold house. Stan hesitated on going in, but Mike grabbed his arm and pulled him, then started the Jewish boy to work by handing him the meat to load into the bike's basket.

"Wow...this seems like a lot..." Stan muttered, taking a slab of ribs from Mike and putting it next to a choice cut.

"We killed three full grown animals this week. We'll probably do that for most the summer..." Mike said, "The butcher will salt some of it, and sell it later in winter. And they'll freeze some stuff too..." Stan swallowed hard as Mike held up a bag full of sheep intestines, and took them by the top and put them in the basket as quick as he could manage. Mike chuckled at the unsettled boy.

"If you'd grown up eating chitlings, you'd feel different about those..." Stan glanced back at them, then seemed to choke back vomit.

"Those...are from a pig, right? Because I can't eat pork...Jews can't eat them, especially their intestines..."

"Usually chitlings are from a pig. But not these..." Mike said, "Those are from a sheep..."

"Well, Jews shouldn't be able to eat sheep intestines either..." Stan moaned, then looked at Mike, "Is this just a meat farm? Don't you... like, grow stuff? Like fruit or corn or...something?" Mike looked at him, then shook his head.

"Well, we grow grass and hay for the sheep and some corn for the pigs, but we don't grow any crops...not anymore anyway. My mother used to keep a little field way down by the creek. She used to tell me my father grew all sorts of things out there. But...she hasn't kept it in

years...” Mike said, recalling from his youth walking with his mother, passing different vegetables and flowers laid out in neat rows and helping her put fertilizer down and water the rows of plants.

“Is it still there?” Stan asked. Mike looked at the boy, who seemed on the verge of being ill, and pointed.

“Let’s go find out. Here, put this last cut in there and we’ll walk it down to the creek...” Mike wrapped up a large leg of lamb, then Stan put it in the basket. The two of them pushed the bike out of the cold house, then they went slowly through the farm. Stan, not having visited it for a couple years, asked Mike about everything he could remember, and Mike was happy to show him. The old barn where they kept most the sheep. The newer barn, just over the hill, which was for the pigs and stank to high heaven. The two big hen houses and the shared fenced-in area where the chickens were busily clucking and pecking at the ground around them. Stan paused to pet a few of the chickens, and Mike even put one into Stan’s arms for a bit before it clucked loudly and started pecking at the boy’s face. Then they went down the hill, past the farm’s ancient root cellar, a squat supply shed filled to bursting with different farm tools, and a small hay and corn field. Then, they found the remains of his mother’s field, a set of four dirt mounds, each about 6 by 4 feet, planted on a gentle slope on that side of the hill.

The creek, strong and loud in spring and winter, was making little more than a trickling noise, and beyond that, numerous tall, diverse trees shook in the wind, while birds sang and chirped as they bounced from tree to tree. The combinations of the sounds and sight gave the place a sense of calmness and serenity, and Mike felt compelled to set the bike down, and sit on the ground next to the mounds. Stan followed, getting down next to Mike, and he looked up into the woods and trees, his eyes bouncing from branch to branch, and probably from bird to bird. They sat like this for what to Mike seemed like a long time, then finally, Stan leaned over the nearest mound and put a few fingers in the dirt.

“The soil isn’t good anymore...but the place is perfect...”

“Yeah. But, if the dirt’s bad...” Mike shrugged, “I suppose it’s just stay overgrown...” Stan ran a few fingers over the dirt, then looked

up at Mike.

“What if...what if I came here...a few times a week? And planted some flowers?” Stan asked. Mike turned, and his eyes meet Stan’s. And somehow, this question, this idea, it felt like the most natural thing in the world. In fact, it seemed as if both Stan and Mike were being led to this conclusion by something bigger than either of them.

“Yeah. I think you should do that. I’ll help you get it ready. But I’m not any good with plants...”

“That’s alright. I’m not any good with animals. But my mother used to have me help with a community garden, up until last year. I actually kind’ve miss it...I think it’ll be nice raising flowers again...” Mike smiled at the boy. Then, there was a loud yell, and he turned around to see his furious grandfather coming toward him.

“Dammit Mike, what are you doing? You should’ve been gone by now, boy! I told you to get going with the meat by 11:30, its nearly 12! And why the hell are you out here on the back 40? I already took care of the hay, ain’t shit else here!” his grandfather yelled, stomping toward him. Mike stood up slowly and started trying to explain himself, knowing it was probably a useless exercise.

“I was trying to show...some of the farm...and the old garden. And... I...my bike...”

“Mr. Hanlon!” Stan jumped up and stepped in front of Mike, “It’s my fault. I borrowed Mike’s bike and I asked if he would show me this old field. I...” Stan took a deep breath, then continued, “I was hoping...I could plant some flowers here...” the old man, who was no longer fuming, now had more a look of confusion on his face. He stopped just in front of Stan and squinted at the boy, his eyes searching for something, perhaps recognition. After a moment, he drew back and cleared his throat.

“You’re that Jew boy aren’t you? That rabbi’s kid, the one always sending Jessica home with those cookies...” the old man said, then looked at the field, “Gonna be a hell of a lot of work, hope those pretty hands know how to handle some dirt...come on you two...” Mike’s grandfather waved at the boys, and started back up the hill.

Mike, surprised by his grandfather's sudden calmness, looked at Stan, then picked up the bike and the two of them pushed it, following the old man to the shed on the side of the hill. When he opened it, Mike's grandfather fished out a garden rake, a hoe, a hand shovel as well as a spade, then he dragged out two bags of soil.

"Alright Jew boy..." the old man picked up a set of gloves and held them out to Stan, "This ought to be enough to get you started. I've got a few seeds in here too, but you're probably gonna wanna have you mamma buy you some flowers from the store...they'll grow better this late in the summer..." Stan took the gloves and held them tightly, like they were something precious. Mike smiled at him, then his grandfather snapped at him.

"Now you listen. If that boy plants his flowers and you just let his field turn back into that mess out there, I'mma kick you ass, Michael!" the old man roared. Stan smiled at Mike, then put on his gloves slowly, and flexed his fingers, as if testing them out, "Looks like they fit," Mike's grandfather continued, "They'll be yours here at the farm. Now, boy!" his grandfather held up a finger at Mike, a scowl taking over his face, "You best get! That meat is gonna rot if you don't get it down to the butcher now! And you know what happens if they tell me they can't sell my product!" Mike nodded, and quickly gathered the tools and soil on the side of the shed, then, he joined Stan in pushing the bike back through the farm to the street. Mike got on the seat, and Stan moved to sit behind him, letting his gloved hands slip around Mike's chest. As they started away, Mike noticed something. That the void, that emptiness, it was almost nothing. A shallow hole, almost filled.

"Stan..." Mike murmured, as Stan leaned forward and put his chin on Mike shoulder.

"Mike..." he muttered back. And the two exchanged no more words as they headed into town.

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Unlike either Mike or Stan, Richie did not feel a void or emptiness. Instead, Richie had been feeling a certain lack of inhibition over the last 2 weeks. In fact, Richie seemed to be in denial about the very

idea of consequences. He'd cussed out most everyone he'd seen or talked too: his cousins, his parent's friend's kids, his parent's friends, and even his mother, which had gotten him a slap to the face from his father. He'd jumped off the cliff into the quarry's waters twice already, not even slightly afraid of the rocks nor the height. The day before, he'd been out exploring the woods near his house until almost 2 in the morning despite the many sounds of animals, the dangerous pitfalls and the rotting trunks he'd traversed. He didn't even care about the irritated yelling of his mother that he heard when he'd come back. Richie just couldn't seem to make himself worry about responsibilities or being punished for his actions. In summary, he just didn't seem to give a fuck.

Some part of him suspected it was because of the Loser's club. He hadn't seen any of the other members since Neibolt street, not even Eddie. Seeing Bill, or Ben, or even Beverly or Mike, he didn't really care about. And he knew no matter what he wanted to do, his mother would drag him to Stan's Bar Mitzvah in two weeks, so he didn't really feel a rush on seeing him either. But he did have to admit he missed Eds, who was now locked tightly in his house by his overprotective mother. Richie missed the boy's weak constitution and dour demeanor. He also missed the stack of medical conditions piled on top of the diabetes that made it so easy to crack jokes about him and the way Eddie furrowed his eyebrows and crinkled his forehead when those jokes made him angry. And though he'd never admit it to anyone, Richie missed Eddie's soft chuckle too, a small, almost unnoticeable laugh that only came out rarely, when Richie made a really good one.

Nonetheless, Richie, feeling footloose and unbridled, had walked out of the door of his house after breakfast, and got onto his bike, recovered two days ago when he'd spontaneously walked over to Neibolt, pissed on the remains of the gate, and reclaimed his ride. He sped away from his home, toward downtown Derry. He tested out tricks and jumps on the bike as rode there, and arrived just outside City Hall, flung his ride against a streetlight and started wandering the sidewalk, whistling loudly. He made his way down Main Street for a while, greeting the people he'd pass in various iterations of British, French, Russian and Mexican accents, receiving irritated glares or disquieted glances from most of them, then he crossed over

to go to the city park, nearly getting hit by a honking car on the way.

“Watch where you’re going you stupid motherfucker!” Richie yelled, slamming his hand on the car’s hood and giving the driver the middle finger. The man inside leaned out and flung out a hand at the boy.

“You’re the one walking across the street without looking! Be careful kid! You’re gonna end up as roadkill!” Richie stepped out of the way of the car and stuck out his tongue.

“Your mom’s ass!” Richie shouted. The man shook his head, then started on, leaving Richie giggling to himself, “Idiot...” The irreverent boy took a few steps and hesitated, as he was suddenly faced with a circus. The construction of a circus that is. It was Derry’s annual Independence Day Circus Party, and Richie was seeing clowns. A lot of them. A group of three were standing to one side, each with a cigarette in their hand. Two others were arguing over balloon animals they were holding. Others seemed to be walking back and forth, talking or moving boxes and materials. And one...one was mysteriously sitting on a bench, holding a big red balloon and facing away from Richie. This clown was bald on the top, though it had a mess of red puffs of hair on the sides. And, it was in a white and grey ruffled clown costume. One very similar to...that clown...

Richie drew back from it, trying not to lose his shit, when a hand gripped his shoulder.

“Richie...” a voice said behind him.

“Motherfucker! Back the fuck up!” Richie roared, jumping back and holding up his fists, though he didn’t know what exactly he was going to do. After a moment, he dropped his hands as he recognized that the man behind him was Zack Denbrough, Bill’s dad. Mr. Denbrough was partially dressed like a clown, in a big, stripped white and red one piece and a conical hat with a pom-pom on the top. But he was otherwise normal, and Richie didn’t really feel evil emanating from him.

“Richie!” Mr. Denbrough said, drawing back at the foul boy. Richie knew he’d cussed out Bill’s father, but his lack of concern took him over and he suddenly didn’t care.

“What are you doing here? Why are you dressed like a clown?” Richie asked, drawing back from the man. Mr. Denbrough, still frowning, crossed his arms.

“The mayor asked some of the folks around town to be part of the post-July Fourth Circus Party. But you had to have a circus style costume, and I found this clown suit in the mall last week. We just finished with a run-through. Most of these folks don’t know anything about clowning, that was just the easiest thing to dress up as...” Richie looked Mr. Denbrough’s costume, examining for any signs of evil or blood on his fingers, then, he looked back to the other clowns and saw he recognized a lot of them. His neighbor, his cousin’s neighbors, the old man who lived down the street, and even the one sitting down, the bald one with the red balloon, stood up and turned around, and Richie recognized him as Mr. Marvin, a normally old, slow and boring math teacher at his school. Mr. Marvin had a daughter, however, a cute one, and Richie could see that she was out in the park too, sitting on a bench a short distance away from him, talking with two other girls.

“Richie, do your parents know you’re down here? And talking like that?” Mr. Denbrough asked. Richie shrugged, and started walking away from Mr. Denbrough, moving toward the girls.

“Sort’ve. I told them I was out! Nice to see you Mr. Denbrough. Tell Bill I said hi!” Richie said, turning toward the girls. He regretted it as soon as the words were out. He should’ve told Mr. Denbrough to tell Bill to fuck off. Richie almost turned around to say that, but he could see Mr. Denbrough shaking his head and walking away, and instead turned to move toward the girls, smiling and starting to whistle again. As he stepped right up to Lillia Marvin, Richie leaned heavily on the side of the bench and gave her a wide grin.

“Hey pretty thing...” Richie said in what was apparently a new voice. He’d call this one, *Charming Paramour*. Of course, it sounded a lot like Richie’s normal voice, except it was a little deeper and said things he could barely believe were coming out of his mouth, “What’s a babe like you doing around the circus freaks?” Lillia, along with the other two girls, were so shocked by Richie’s forwardness that they just stared at him for a while. Richie bounced his eyebrows, then Lillia, finally finding her voice, scoffed and drew back from him.



“Back up, four-eyes! I’m dating Victor, loser...” Richie had, vaguely, remembered hearing that this girl was in fact dating Vic Criss, a tall, and cruel member of Henry Bowers gang. Richie also recalled something else he’d heard about Vic.

“Oh right, Victor. So, I was wondering and you would know, is his dick really just a little bigger than my pinkie here...” Richie held up his small finger, then, he bent it slightly, “I heard it’s also shaped like a banana. Must not be so fun to have inside you, huh?” Lillia’s eyes were wide, as were the two other girls, who both looked at each other, then at Lillia and, to Richie’s delight, started to snicker. Lillia, however, jumped to her feet and shoved Richie back.

“Get out of here trashmouth! I’ll...I’ll...” Lillia trailed off, and Richie smiled.

“I think you’ll find I’m a much more sizable...and better fuck, sugar...” the two other girls were now struggling to hold back laughter, and Lillia, now red and angry, stomped away.

“We’ll see you later, Richie...” one of the other girls said. Richie winked at them, then continued wandering the park, whistling to himself. He looked over the setup for the rest of the circus event, cursed at the smoking clowns, who laughed at the boy, and then looked into a few of the fireworks cannons. He finally started heading to other side of the park, back in the direction of his bike, when he saw two boys zoom past him. It was just a flash, but he recognized that it was Stan and Mike, on the black boy’s bike, which Richie suddenly remembered he’d forgotten to give back to him, and they were headed quickly down Main Street. Richie moved to follow them, but saw they were turning down East Avenue, probably in the direction of Stan’s house. He thought about heading there to meet them, but his plan was interrupted by a scream. A scream that was approaching him.

“Where are you, fuckface? Say your stupid insults to my face!” Richie turned around to see Victor, with Lillia at his side, stomping through the middle of the park. Richie, who clearly lost any concern for his own safety, whistled as loud as he could and waved at the boy.

“Hey Victor, sounds like you’re a little offended. If you want, I’ll take

mine out and we can measure! Unless you're scared what I said might be true?" Richie yelled. He started to undo his pants, but couldn't get very far, as Victor was soon barreling toward him, a fury in his eyes that Richie suspected it was best to run from. Richie took off down an alley, Victor on his heels, then went around another corner, and was in front of a flower shop. Richie shoved the door open as hard as he could, then turned and ran past the shop, rounding another corner. Finally, he was back on Main Street, and he sighed in relief for a moment before Victor roared again.

"Four-eyed faggot! You can't hide from me!"

Richie, hearing the voice nearing him, rushed down the sidewalk until he got to the first door, and burst through it. The door flung open with a loud ring, and Richie cursed under his breath, then tried quickly to push it shut. Richie looked out of through a nearby window to see Victor come out on Main Street a few seconds later, looking back and forth. Richie stepped back from the window, giggling at the confused boy, and turned around and bumped into Eddie. It took Richie a moment to recognize where he was; the white, sterile environment of the store told him he had to be in Mr. Keene's pharmacy. Each aisle was filled with band-aids, wraps, cotton, as well as bottles and bottles of pills and liquids. And, Eddie was standing there, in the middle of two aisles, his right hand in a tight white cast, his left holding a bag of what appeared to be numerous pills. Eddie, his face filled with surprise, hesitated, then he leaned forward.

"Richie...is that you? Are you..." Eddie couldn't finish as Richie snatched up the boy in a big bear hug and nearly picked him up.

"Eds!" Richie yelled squeezing the boy tightly. Probably too tightly. After a moment, Eddie's unbroken hand wrapped around Richie, and the boy made an effort to pressed his head into Richie's arm.

"Richie...I missed you..."

"I missed..." Richie started, before, he was interrupted by an angry squeal.

"Eddie! What are you doing!" Richie turned to see Eddie's mother thunder down an aisle and snatch the small boy's good hand into

hers. Sonia Kapsbrak was a big woman; Richie had often mocked Eddie about the size of her trunk-like legs and arms, sizable breasts and hefty bottom. The woman looked down at Richie with thick glasses, almost as thick as Richie's, and scoffed at him, "You stay away from my Eddie! You and your friends' antics broke my boy's arm. Oh, I knew it was a mistake to bring you out to the pharmacist, Eddie..." Richie looked at Eddie, who averted his gaze for a few seconds, and Richie sighed, and turned around to see Victor open the pharmacy door. The boy went to one aisle and started to pursue different set of band-aids, but his glances at Richie made it clear why he was there. Richie gulped and started to stumble back to Eddie and his mother.

"Shit...I'm dead..."

"Vic?" Eddie muttered, then looked at Richie and whispered, "Richie, what did you do?"

"Don't talk to him, Eddie! He's a bad influence, and probably going to make you sicker..." his mother said. This, amazingly, caused Eddie to start yelling, something Richie couldn't ever remember seeing him do.

"Mom. I know I'm sick!" Eddie spat, pulling his arm away from her, "I know I have diabetes. You never let me forget it. But Mom, Richie didn't cause that. Richie didn't make me get sick as a baby, Richie didn't give me asthma or gut problems or heart disease, okay? Richie didn't break my arm either! He told Bill not to take us there, and when I went anyway, I fell and broke my arm bad, and it was Richie who fixed it!"

"But...but Eddie..."

"Mom. I'm miserable. I'm miserable trapped with you. But, I felt happy today..." Eddie went over and wrapped an arm in Richie's, "I'm happy because I saw Richie. You want me to be safe AND happy, right, Mom?" the big woman shifted her weight from leg to leg in what looked to be a very uncomfortable manner. Then, she groaned and looked over Richie.

"Just him, right?" she asked. Eddie held Richie's arm tightly. Richie

gave her a big, silly grin, then glanced over his shoulder to see Victor was close, pretending to look over bandage wraps now.

“Ugh, Mom...Okay, just Richie...” Eddie said.

“I’ll be very good, Ms. Kapsbrack. Only games where Eddie can’t get hurt. And I’ll be gone before it gets dark and Eddie could trip...” Eddie elbowed the boy, but Richie only grinned wider. The woman sighed, then waved a hand.

“Very well. Richie, just Richie, can spend time with you...” Eddie glanced at Victor, then at his mother.

“What if he came over now? Like, got in the car with us to go home?”

“Eddie, I...”

“Please...” Eddie asked, looking pitiful and sad. The woman sighed again and nodded.

“Okay. For my little Eddie, he can. Let me just pick up my cough medicine...” she said, starting away. Eddie looked at her, then at Richie and at Victor as she started to move toward another aisle. The two boys tried to stay behind her, and Victor behind them, none trying to get too close nor out of sight of the other. Eventually, Richie turned Eddie suddenly down one aisle, then jerked him as hard as he could to another aisle. Then, Richie went to the pharmacy desk and snuck under it, hiding behind the counter as Victor came past. He growled and moved on to the far side, glancing around. Richie giggled as he left and he saw Eddie did too. That was the laugh he’d missed. Richie gave him a grin, then looked down to see Eddie’s cast was signed. Someone had written LOSER on it.

“Eddie? Who did that?” Richie asked. Eddie looked at him, then pointed to a girl, chewing gum and flipping through a magazine, who was sitting behind the counter as well. This was Gretta, the pharmacist’s daughter, and she didn’t even seem to notice the two, still flipping through the magazine until Richie stood up.

“Hey, toots...” Richie said, winking at her. She looked up, then dropped the magazine and stood up as well.

“You’re not supposed to be back here, Four-eyes!” Gretta said.

“I know I’m not...” Richie said, leaning over and grabbing a big red marker from a desk near her, “But I had to fix Eds’ here cast...” Richie grabbed the boy’s arm, and started to mark over the cast, replacing the S in LOSER with a V to make LOVER. Gretta watched him, then blew and snapped a gum bubble in his face.

“Real cool. Now, get out from...”

“Wait, I got one more thing to write!” Richie said, rushing forward, marker in hand, and grabbing the girls shoulder. He made a big V on her forehead, then jumped back.

“There! V for virgin!”

“What! You little!” the girl started for Richie, but he pulled Eddie out from the desk and got on the outside, where Ms. Kapsbrack was coming forward with a set of bottles.

“Gretta dear, ring me up!” the woman said. The girl hesitated, then the pharmacist, Mr. Keene, came out from the back and put his hands on his hips.

“Come on Gretta, I’ve shown you how to do this...” Gretta, now covering her forehead, looked between her father, Ms. Kapsbrack and Richie, and pushed past him, almost crying.

“What got into her?” Mr. Keene asked. Ms. Kaspbrak shrugged.

“Probably allergies. I’d add some Claritin to her dosage if I were you...”

“Right...” Mr. Keene murmured, then scanned the medicine quickly and took Ms. Kaspbrak’s money. The big woman was soon leading the boys out, past a truly furious Victor, who Richie flicked off as he walked past, then the two boys got into the back seat of the car with the woman. Soon, they were leaving central Derry behind, and Richie was sighing in relief, while Eddie was looking in wonder at his cast.

“You...you fixed it...”

“Yeah, Eds, I couldn’t have you walking around with that messed up thing on it...”

“Lover...” Eddie murmured, then look up at him, admiration and... something else in his eyes. Richie smiled, then looked at the thick pile of medication next to Eddie.

“Jesus man. You’ve got it bad. I’ve never even heard of some of these medicines...” Richie said, picking up one bottle with a red top, “This has...pla-ce-bo in it? Must be strong stuff...” Eddie frowned then grabbed a blue bottle and looked at that.

“This has placebo in it too. I wonder why they both...” his mother reached a powerful hand back and swiped up most of the medication.

“Look Eddie, you made me pick up the boy and got mad at me for bringing up your sicknesses. Don’t waste time talking about them, then, right?” Ms. Kaspbrak said.

“You hear that Eddie? You better listen now, whippersnapper!” Richie asked, in his "Old Man Eustace" voice, then he looked up at Eddie’s mother and returned to his normal tone, “Wait, do you mind if we stop by my house, Ms. Kaspbrak? I got a new game for us to play. It’s called *Trouble*...” the woman gave Richie a skeptical glance and he held up a hand, “It’s a board game, real fun. Newest biggest thing...doesn’t involve real trouble, I promise...” the woman eyed Eddie in the mirror, then nodded, and Richie turned Eddie, smiling, “It’s gonna be a load of fun, I...” Eddie suddenly leaned over and grabbed Richie with his good hand, pulling him in close.

“I missed you Richie...I’m glad you’re here...” Eddie whispered in his ear, and put his head onto Richie’s shoulder. Richie beamed back and leaned in to Eddie’s ear.

“Awh...I missed you to, Eddie...” Richie said, then, he noticed something. Something surprising, that shocked even him. Richie, once again, gave a fuck.

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“Richie went out this morning, like he has the last couple of days. But

I'll let him know you want to hang out, Ben..."

"Thank Mrs. Tozier..." Ben said, then put the phone down. He looked back at Beverley, who was sitting one of his living room chairs, raised an eyebrow.

"Progress?"

"Maybe. At least Richie will get my message...Eddie's mother didn't even answer..."

"You're doing better than I am. Mike's grandfather told me, as a white girl, to stay away from his black grandson..."

"Good lord..." Ben sighed, then crossed his arms and looked at Bill who was sitting on the other side of his living room. He had a glass of Ben's mother's lemonade on the table next to him, but unlike Beverly, who had drank most of hers, Bill's was largely untouched. The boy was clearly deep in thought. Or maybe he was stuck in a funk. Ben had noted that, more than usual, Bill had seemed to be feeling a certain listlessness over the past three weeks. Ben wasn't himself totally together either. He was feeling a deep sense of guilt about the events in the house. If he'd drawn a short straw instead of Mike, he might've better protected Richie or Eddie. If he'd practiced or worked out harder before, he might have been able to keep the werewolf clown from striking Beverley. If he had done javelin instead of discus, he might've been able to skewer the bat clown before it made Stan pee himself. This was making him work out hard or plan out scenarios in preparation for fighting the clown again. And that guilt and his attempts to fix it were making it hard to enjoy the summer.

Every time he tried to do something he really enjoyed, playing basketball, or reading the horror or fantasy novels he normally loved, or even listening to his large collection of New Kids on the Block tapes, he'd lose focus, start reflecting on his failures at the Neibolt house, and be back to prepping for another showdown with the clown. His crushing regret faded, however, when he was with Beverley. And that had translated to him spending a lot of time with her; watching movies together, playing games; he would even read while she practiced piano or threw discus while she talked to him. As long as he was with her...it was better. This didn't seem to be the

case for Bill, who looked barely able to do more than move whenever Ben saw him.

“Bill...” Ben said. Bill turned to look at him, and Ben sighed, “You had any luck? With Richie or Stan?”

“Not for hanging out,” Bill said, running a hand through his hair and shaking his head, “I did get Stan’s mom to tell me the day and time of his Bar Mitzvah. And, I really think if I go, I’m going to see both Richie and Mike there...”

“Hmph...you with Richie?” Beverley muttered, clasping her hands together, “Should I come with you? So there isn’t a scene?” Ben looked at the girl. The girl of his dreams. She was radiant in the morning sun at that moment, and, unlike either Ben or Bill, seemed to be her same strong young woman they’d both talked to on the last day of school, neither unmoored or weakened by encounters with the clown.

“No...I don’t think it will help...” Bill said, looking back out of the window. Ben started to feel a certain regret that he couldn’t help Bill keep the Losers together, “If I go alone...maybe...maybe me and Richie can be honest with each other...without it becoming a shouting match. My dad said he saw Richie last week. He said Richie cursed him out, but told him to tell me ‘hi.’ Part of me suspects my dad was trying to make me feel better...but...maybe, if his anger is starting to thaw...”

“Oh Bill...I’m sorry man. Good luck...” Ben said. Beverley sighed, and shook her head.

“You guys...I thought you were best friends? The four of you, Stan, Eddie, Richie and you. Mike, Ben and I were on the outside...you guys knew each other forever...”

“Since school started...” Bill said, resting his head on a hand and frowning, “I probably knew Richie before that. We don’t live that far apart...”

“When I saw you guys in school, you seemed okay...”



“Richie didn’t usually yell or fight with me in front of Stan and Eddie. Because Stan and Eddie don’t know what happened, other than it was something bad. Nobody knows everything. But...” Bill turned back to the window and sighed, “I made a horrible mistake. A stupid, childish mistake, and I hurt Richie’s feelings. And he hates me for it. Maybe he should...” Ben’s regret suddenly overwhelmed him. His regrets for almost wrong everything he did. Ben sighed deeply and felt like his every mistake was being replayed in his mind. But, after a moment, he sensed that maybe it wasn’t really his regret. Ben looked up, and made a decision. Bill had to come to terms with what happened between him and Richie, or the Loser club would be killed or destroyed by the clown.

“We don’t have time for this...” Beverley said, agreeing with Ben’s thoughts, “The clown isn’t waiting around for us to resolve our differences. We’ve got to get the group back together...”

“Right...” Ben said. He sat down on a loveseat opposite Bill and next to Beverley, “Can’t you two just hash out your differences and work it out?”

“I’ve tried...” Bill said, “But, Richie won’t forgive me. He said so again, outside the Neibolt house...”

“Can I help? Maybe talk to Richie for you, or mediate...” Ben asked. Bill shrugged.

“Eddie’s tried. A lot. Stan tried once. You can try. But I don’t think... anything can fix what I broke...” Bill sighed, and looked again out of the window. Beverley snorted, and grabbed her purse. Ben only then noticed she was carrying it with her. It seemed like something she didn’t want to carry, but her mother made her take with her. Ben suddenly felt bad for her having to carry it, and held out a hand.

“If you need Beverley, I...”

“Hush Big Ben. I don’t need you sad sapping about this...Come on, Bill. You look half a ghost. Let’s go do something...” Beverley said. Ben looked at her, then glanced down at the paper in front of him and saw movie times. And had an idea. In a dark theater, where Ben could talk to Bill quietly...

“Let’s go see *Batman*. It’s still playing...there’s a show in a half hour,” Ben said. Beverley sighed and looked at Bill, who remained fixed on something outside of the window.

“Ugh...superheroes...” Beverley muttered, then went to Bill and put her hand on his, “Come on Bill. Let’s go see if it’s worth it...” Bill turned to her slowly, then stood up. Ben and Beverley almost guided the boy to his bike, and, once on the famed, *Silver*, Bill momentarily became lively. They raced to the theater, the bulked up Ben crushing his competition, and, as it turned out, they were three of only about 10 moviegoers for that show. Once they got their tickets, Beverley led the group to the concession stand, where a young, heavy, college age boy with acne and glasses was behind the register. Beverley flirted him into giving her a bag a popcorn while Ben paid for his favorite candy, *Butterfinger* bites. Bill remained indecisive and was staring at the different candy boxes vacantly until Beverley demanded he get something sweet, and so he ended up with *Care Bear Gummi Bears*. The three of them sat in the largely empty theater, eating their snacks as advertisements played on the big screen. Ben sat next to Bill, with Beverley on the other side, and Ben leaned over to Bill after throwing back a handful of candy.

“Hey...” Ben started, “Bill, what happened between you and Richie?” Bill glanced at him, then looked at Beverley, who was at that moment focused on the ad for *Steel Magnolia*’s coming out later that year. Bill glanced back at Ben, and sighed.

“I can’t tell you. Richie would hate me more. And I...I’m afraid...of it...”

“The clown?” Bill hesitated, then shook his head.

“No. I’m afraid of what happened. And...and of what I’m apparently capable of...” Bill whispered, perhaps a little too loudly. Ben sighed, and threw back another handful of the *Butterfinger*, then looked back at Bill.

“I think...maybe...one reason Eddie and Stan couldn’t help you two is because they didn’t know what happened. If...if it’s a secret, the guilt...it will haunt you until you die...but...if somebody knows...”

"I'm telling you, Richie would hate me, completely. And never forgive me."

"Shh!" Ben and Bill turned to where an older woman was sitting a few rows up. Ben rolled his eyes at the woman, then leaned in close to Bill's ear.

"Isn't that how he feels about you now?" Ben asked. Bill glanced at Ben, then looked back at the screen. Ben suspected that somewhere, in some universe, Bill would've started stuttering and mumbling about what happened. But here, in this world, as the opening sounds of *Batman* began, Bill looked at Ben and spoke fluently about the events. As fluently as could be expected.

"It was a camp, summer of last year. Two weeks. There was an earthquake right before...and I caught something there...a real bad cough...then Georgie..." Bill trailed off, then cleared his throat, "Richie and me and some boys from other schools around Maine went. No one else from Derry. Stan was doing some Jewish thing and Eddie's mother wouldn't let him leave home that long..."

"Richie and I were in a cabin for days. And days. And we..." Bill paused, looked at Beverley, engrossed in the movie, and then looked at Ben, "Well, me and Richie hung out a lot...because...we didn't know anyone else. And then...one day...a horrible day...I was in the showers..." Ben looked at Bill, an eyebrow raised.

"What...did you..."

"It wasn't that...Richie...you know how he is. He had a washcloth soaked in vinegar or snake oil or something he was going to hit me with. But, of course, he looked like he was sneaking into my shower stall. And when I shoved him out, I yelled that he was a faggot and should get lost..." Bill shook his head as he said this a little too loud.

"Shh!" the old woman made the same noise and Bill, sighing, leaned in to Ben's ear.

"The other boys saw...and misunderstood. Or wanted to, they never like "Four-eyes" anyway. So, they called him names, beat him up, spat on him, Richie was so mortified, so tortured..." Bill sighed, "He

didn't mean it. It was a joke. But..." Ben looked at him, feeling horrible, empathetic regret for Richie at what had to seem like a tragic horror story, even with boys he probably would never see again. In fact, it was almost laughably convenient, a horribly embarrassing experience that would last only a few days and have little to no lasting impact on life in Derry.

"But Bill...if all you did was call him it once, then other boys..."

"It wasn't just them! I...I was finally cool at the camp, not a nobody, and so...I made fun of him too! More than any of them!" Bill spat. He covered his mouth, and looked at the angry old woman, who glared at the boys. Ben could see tears welling in his eyes, and Beverley put a hand on Bill's shoulder.

"Explain to Ben quieter!" Beverley said. Bill looked her over and nodded, then turned back to Ben.

"Why, Bill? Did it matter that much?" Ben asked as quiet as he could. Bill shrugged, then leaned in to his ear again.

"I don't know. I really don't. I don't even know why we had to go to that stupid summer camp. But I did, and I joined with the other boys and mocked him. I told him he was a faggot and needed to keep away from me. And the other boys made Richie take his sleeping bag outside so that I could have my room to myself the last few days. And I let them."

"The minute the camp was over, I figured out what an idiot I was. When we were home, I tried to apologize, tried to explain I had been stupid and mean and horrible. But it was too late. Richie hated me. And now, he still hates me...then, I was got sick as hell, and my brother was killed....what a shitty fucking summer..."

"Bill..." Ben murmured, now feeling the horrible regret and disgust Bill was emanating, "Wow...you messed up...like bad. Like really bad..."

"I know I did, Ben, I know, dammit..." Bill muttered, looking back at the screen. Batman was swinging down from a building, kicking a villain as he went, quickly solving his problems. Ben suspected Bill

wished it was that easy for him, “I don’t know how to fix what happened. It’s...it’s like something bigger than either of us created that situation so that it couldn’t be fixed...maybe if I had a stutter or was messed up some other way, he’d...I don’t know, be more okay with me.”

“Look, maybe if was fat, I would’ve been the one Henry Bowers was trying to carve on instead of you. And maybe then...maybe we wouldn’t have ever met each other. Or maybe we would be better friends than before. But, we can’t change who we are, we just have to...”

“Excuse me boys...” a man in the uniform of the theater said. He was standing at the end of the row, leaning over toward Bill, Ben and Beverley, though he was looking at the two boys in particular, “I’ve heard several complaints about you. And I’m going to have to ask you to leave as you are disturbing the other patrons...” Ben looked at him, then at Bill, who sighed and stood up, going past Beverley and the man and walking out. Ben moved to follow him, going around the man roughly and following Bill as he wandered out of the theater. Once they were outside, Ben reached out and grabbed Bill’s arm.

“Hey, we don’t have to take that! He can’t tell us to leave! You know how much talking I heard when I saw *Do the Right Thing?*”

“It’s okay Ben...you were right. Telling you...helped me. Now that somebody knows. It almost feels like a weight I was carrying...I’ve put it down...I hope you don’t hate me too, though...” Bill said.

“No...I don’t hate you. But...Bill...I think...” Ben hesitated. He barely knew this boy, hell, any of these people. But he knew in his heart that what he was saying was true, “If you and Richie can’t make peace and work together, the Loser’s club...it’s going to be hard for us to keep together. Or to win against the clown...” Bill looked at Ben, and shrugged.

“Then we need to make sure the group gets back together...”

“Hmph...” Beverley stomped out of the theater, arms crossed and face in a scowl, “Well, you got kicked out of a movie. I hope it was worth it...” Bill looked her over, then Ben had an idea. He was going

to try to fix Bill's guilt. Because he'd been in a bad spat before.

"You know...I got an idea..." Ben said, "One time, back in my old house, I once got into with my dad. Really got into it. He and I weren't talking for a whole month. But then, my mom bought me a new model dragon. A really big one, that I had to use glue for. And you know I like fantasy...but my dad does to. So...if I was gonna build it, I had to have his help. And he really needed me because my hands were smaller and could connect the pieces easier...we had to stop fighting, stop arguing, stop giving the cold shoulder, and work together. And soon, me and my dad were close again..."

"What are you gonna do Ben, lock Bill and Richie in a room with a model plane and hope they come out holding hands?" Beverley asked. Bill looked at her, then at Ben, and for the first time in weeks, maybe in months, Ben saw a smile slip on Bill's face.

"No, not a model. I've got something for us to do. Something Richie, Eddie and I did together when we were younger...something I suspect they won't be able to resist..." Bill started walking away from the theater, heading in the direction of the quarry, and beyond, the barrens, "We're going to build a dam."

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

Thanks for reading! Comments and kudos are always welcome!

Also, to help me write, I made a playlist, with a song for each of the Losers. If anyone is interested, its posted below. I don't own any songs or any Stephen King characters.

100 Bad Days, AJR - Richie  
Candyman, ZEDD - Mike  
Wanted, OneRepublic - Ben  
I Will Return, Skylar Grey - Beverly  
Rescue Me, OneRepublic - Stan  
Sick Boy, Chainsmokers - Eddie  
Love is the Answer, Aloe Blacc - Bill

## 4. Birds and Rodents

### Notes for the Chapter:

Next up, perspectives from Stan and Eddie a little later in the summer. Kudos and Comments welcome!

Stan stepped in front of the mirror, and looked himself over. He was in a tight button up, a nice shirt, with long sleeves. And he was of course in one of his nicest pair of khaki shorts with a shiny leather belt holding them up. He adjusted the buttons in the mirror, then sighed and groaned. Trying to look nice this day was stupid, since he'd be down on his knees digging through muck in a couple of minutes. In three days, at his Bar Mitzvah, yeah, it made sense to get his hair straightened and to make sure his suit fit and that his new tallit was cleaned and spotless. But today, since it was finally time for him to plant his flowers on Mike's farm, it made no sense what so even to try and look nice. But, here he was...trying to look nice. Somewhere in his heart, he thought he knew why, though he wouldn't let himself consider it. Instead, for now, he remained busy fussing about how his buttons looked in front of the mirror until his mother started calling him.

"Stanley! Stanley, are you ready?" Andrea Uris, an at home mother and doting parent, called from downstairs. Stan sighed, tried to get his curls in some kind of order, then turned from the mirror.

"Almost, mom. Just a minute..." Stan called. And then, the events came back to him. The terror of the bat, the horror of that painting coming to life and attacking him. The huge, bloody teeth of the werewolf. And the awful, evil smile of that clown. Stan tried to breath deeply and not have a breakdown. He was going to see his... well, best friend right now. To plant beautiful flowers in a lovely garden. He'd been back to Mike's farm pretty much every other day since he'd suggested the idea. And they'd worked on the mounds, weeding them multiple times, replacing all the dirt, and getting mulch ready to cover the florae once they were grown. And now, finally, Stan would get to plant his flowers...the ones his mother had bought earlier today. But, of course...crybaby Stan was going to have a breakdown about the stupid clown. Stan took a few deep breathes,

then after a moment, his eyes rose to the top of his mirror, where a small *Magen David*, or Star of David, was carved out of the wooden frame.

“Okay...Adonai...” Stan started, clasping his hands together, which he knew wasn’t Jewish, but he wasn’t going to stop, “I promise...I’ll be a really good Jew. And I’ll pray from the Torah perfectly at the Bar Mitzvah and make my father proud...and I’ll go to temple, and observe *shabbath*...” Stan hesitated, then sighed, “I’ll do all that. But...I need your help. Because...the clown scares me...so bad. Don’t let it hurt me Adonai...please...help me be strong...I’ll do whatever you want...”

“Stanley! Stanley, come on, we’re gonna be late!” Stan’s mother called. Stan sighed, and opened his eyes, looking at the *Magen David* grumpily.

“Adonai...you made me this way. You made me...weak and a sissy...” Stan hesitated, and shook his head, “I think thoughts that aren’t right. About my best friends...don’t punish me for it with the clown...please...give me a way to fight it. Or get away from it. Or...protect me...and my friends, from it.” Stan begged, then blew out his breath. It was stupid. It was a stupid prayer and a stupid bargain. God probably didn’t care how good Stanley was. Or how often he was in temple. Otherwise, would he have been attacked by his father’s painting and a giant bat? Or worse, would he have...those thoughts...about Mike?

“Stanley! Let’s go! You’re keeping the Hanlons waiting!” his mother called. Stanley undid his top button, then went downstairs quickly. His mother, eyeing him, was standing near the door. As he approached, she held out a plate covered in aluminum foil.

“Sorry...mom...” Stan said, taking the Hamantaschen cookies he knew were inside. She sighed, and opened the door.

“I already loaded your flowers. But Stanley, you’ve got to be responsible if you’re going to do this. Neither I nor your father are going to make you water or tend to these...”

“I know. I’ll take care of them. Thank you...” Stan said. He started



out when his mother pointed at their dinner table.

“Do you want your birdwatching book and binoculars?” His mother asked. Stan looked at them, hesitated, then picked them up and carried them with the cookies to the car. Stan wasn’t really proud that this was a hobby he’d picked up. He kept it to himself, generally. Richie probably would’ve teased him mercilessly for it and Bill and Eddie would’ve laughed at the jokes...so he never told any of them. But, in the creek and woods on the edge of Mike’s farm, where he was planting his flowers, it was about as good of bird watching space as you could find in Derry.

Stan got into the car, holding the book, binoculars and cookies, and hoping that Mike wouldn’t think he was too uncool. However, his mother was intent on making him do something that was just plain unpleasant before.

“Now, Stanley, we made a bargain. I buy you these flowers and take them over to the Hanlon’s farm, you memorize your Torah blessings and reading for Saturday...”

“Ugh...right mom...” Stan agreed, trying not to show too much contempt for the language, summoned up and sang the required Hebrew blessings, “Bar’chu et Adonai ham’voras...”

“Ham’vorach, Stanley...” she said. When she corrected him, it was much gentler than his father, who usually spat Hebrew and Yiddish insults at him.

“Ham’vorach...l’olam va-ed...” Stan continued the blessing, needing to have his pronunciation corrected twice more, but finishing the phrase. Stan sighed, and cleared his throat. He’d done the easy part. This was where it got rough.

“Ahem...Bembidar, First Reading: Vayedaber...Adonay el-Moshe lemor...” Stan chanted, then started to struggle, “Pinchas...Pinchas ben...bin-Elzar...ben-Aharon hakanhine...”

“Hakohen, Stanley. And its Pinchas ben El’azar,” his mother said. Stan, fed up, looked at her and stuck out his lip.

“Mom...why can't dad just read the torah? When Ethan Lavie did his Bar Mitzvah, all he had to do was say the prayers and lead the psalm.”

“Stanley. We've talked about this...you are the son of the rabbi. There are higher expectations...besides, we made a bargain.”

“But...Mom...it's so hard...”

“You're doing fine, Stanley. Continue from Hakohen...” Stan, sighing, tried his best. He got through most of his seven readings, needing a lot of correcting of pronunciation, but only forgetting one line about how many sheep to use in burnt offerings. He finished just as his mother pulled into Mike's farm's driveway. Stanley undid his seat-belt and was about to throw the door open and jump out when his mother gripped his arm.

“Not bad. But you need to practice. Today and tomorrow, okay? Maybe you should practice chanting Hebrew while you're gardening...”

“Mom...” Stan groaned, then he opened the door and jumped out onto the driveway. And his irritation with Hebrew, his frustration with God's unwillingness to negotiate with him, even his deep fear of the clown faded as Stan saw Mike. The boy was already sweaty, and in overalls and a long sleeve shirt. But, his face lit up as Stan approached him, and Stan felt a smile growing on his face as well.

“Mike...”

“Stan...” Mike said. Stan paused, then turned to the woman standing next to Mike, the tall, elegant Jessica Hanlon, who was in a tight purple dress that Stan thought looked really nice on her. She had her hair in a ponytail and some makeup on, but she also looked very tired. Her shoulders slouched slightly, and her eyes had big bags under them, probably from working a night shift. Nonetheless, she seemed kind and welcoming as ever. The same could not be said for Mike's grandfather, the husky, grey haired Leroy Hanlon, who was in grimy overalls and a plaid shirt and denim hat. He had his hands on his hips, and both he and Jessica watched as Stan approached with his plate.

"These are for you, Mrs. Hanlon. From my mom..." Stan said, signaling back to his mother, who was getting out of the car.

"Why, Stanley, thank you. Your family is so generous to us...we really do appreciate it...."

"Oh, Jessica, you don't need to start all that..." Stan's mother said. Stan nodded at Mrs. Hanlon, then, Mr. Hanlon stepped forward, peeled back the foil, and wrinkled his nose at the Hamantaschen inside.

"These them Jew cookies. Hmph...can barely taste the jam for all that bread..." Mr. Hanlon said, then picked up two of the treats and shoved most of both into his mouth. Mrs. Hanlon looked at him in horror.

"Leroy! Show some respect. And stop acting like such an animal. The damn pigs eat cleaner than you do!" Mike's grandfather waved a dismissive hand at her, then picked up three more Hamantaschen and started to walk away. Stan smiled at him, then, Stanley's mother went over to Jessica Hanlon and put an arm on her shoulder.

"Oh, don't you worry. I had to tell Donald's father yesterday that he can't call the German couple that runs the grocery store Krauts anymore. Why..." Stanley's mother kept talking, but Mike had come over to Stan and held out the boy's farm gloves.

"Here Stan..."

"Thanks..." Stan took and put on his gloves, his precious gloves, that gave him power over the garden and maybe his life, and led Mike to his mom's car's trunk, which was filled with flowers: most in sets of six, though a few more shrub like plants were in bigger baskets. The collection included hollyhocks, milkweeds, daisies, golden glow and black-eyed Susans, all plants that Stan's mother knew he loved. Stan smiled at different flowers, then looked at Mike, who nodded.

"These are nice. Gonna be rough to plant them all..."

"I think we can manage..." Stan said. Mike nodded, then started picking up flowers. The two of them got most of the plants down to

the garden area in three trips, and soon were digging up places for flowers to go. Just before they'd finished burying the first one though, Stan's mother approached, holding his birdwatching book and binocs.

"Stanley, you forgot these...here. I'm going to take Mrs. Hanlon out for brunch and some shopping. We'll be back a little after 2..."

"Okay, thanks. See you..." Stan said, taking the book and binoculars. Stanley's mother leaned down and kissed him on the head.

"Be good. I know you two will make this garden look so nice..."

"Okay, mom..." Stan said, "Have fun..." She waved at him and Mike, then went back up the hill. Mike watched her go, then smiled at Stan.

"Somebody likes his mom..."

"It's just...I..." Stan hesitated, then shrugged, "Yeah. I like her. She's nice. And buys me things. Like flowers," Stan patted down the dirt around the first hollyhock, then, using his hand shovel, opened a deep hole nearby for another.

"Hmph...momma's boys aren't so bad...I don't mind this one at least," Mike said, helping Stan get the hole deep enough then placing the hollyhock into the ground, "What's with the book and binoculars?"

"Oh...uh..." Stan looked at the birdwatching book, hesitated a moment, then decided he was going to tell Mike about it, "I...uh...I watch birds. It's one of my favorite hobbies..."

"Watch birds?" Mike questioned, then, there was a yelp, and Mike's grandfather came down the hill quickly.

"Mike! Come here! Something's gone sour with the chickens! Couple of the bitches busted through the fences! Get up here!" Mike looked at Stan, then stood up, following his grandfather.

"Do you need help?" Stan asked, turning to Mike, who waved him back.

“Nawh, my grandpa’s probably just in a mood. I’ll be right back...” Mike said. Stan watched him go, then, he turned back to the garden. He could’ve tried to plant more, but he decided to wait, and sat on the grass, looking up into the woods, where numerous birds were bouncing and chirping, cawing, and peeping. He grabbed his book, and started to flip through the pages, identifying chickadees, doves, fly-catchers, shrikes, several cuckoos and a few nighthawks. He even spotted a swallow tailed kite, which took off and soared far above him. Stan made a small mark in his book for each one he saw and heard, and put a star on the ones he liked the most. He watched the kite closely as it circled around the creek and landed back into the trees. And Stan froze. Because, behind the kite was something... enormous. It was bigger than a golden eagle, which was Stan’s first assumption. And, when a huge set of teeth clamped down on the kite, sending feathers and blood shooting out, Stan knew what was happening.

“No...no...no...no...no...” Stan said, covering his eyes. When he looked again, however, the creature was now climbing out of the trees, and flapped its great black wings. It was the bat, different slightly, with bigger teeth, larger eyes, and with ears that tipped into sharper peaks. Stan could see the bat was the one they’d fought though...the big wings had holes in them from where it had been stabbed, and as the creature started to take off, it let out a defining screech that caused Stan to cover his ears.

“I’m coming for you Stanley. You can’t hide. Not behind Mike...not behind your stupid Jewish god!” the bat cried, then, “Bar’chu et Adonai ham’vorach l’olam va-ed...Stanely...” this was said in clear, correct Hebrew. And, Stan knew that any chance of praying to God for help was gone; the damn monster spoke the holy language better than he could. Stan started to crawl backward, away from the ominous, approaching bat, and his gloved hand stumbled over his dropped birdwatching book. His fingers fumbled and wrapped around it, and he held it up protectively for a moment, then something inside him drove him to open the book and, insanely, start reading the names of the birds. He started, randomly, with the raptors, the hawks, kites and eagles.

“Swallow-tailed kite! Bald eagle! Great black hawk! Northern

harrier!” Stan yelled. The bat seemed unfazed by this, and flapped its wings, which whipped up a great deal of dust and seemed to darken the sky as well. Stan would later recall, however, that the bat didn’t really seem to be flying per say...but more or less...floating.

“Come on, Stanley, Stanny-boy...come on...I’ll take you on a wild ride...we’ll fly up....then down to the sewers...and you and I will have such fun...”

“Sharp-shinned hawk! Cooper’s hawk, Northern goshawk! Golden Eagle!” and with this cry, Stan suddenly felt he was in control. He didn’t know why, or what exactly was happening, but Stan knew he was safe. When the bat swooped in, the claws of its feet were suddenly deflected, and the creature went sailing backwards, crashing with a big splash into the creek. Stan continued to read, moving on to owls, and yelling them at the thing writhing in the water. It splashed and shook and after a moment, blood seemed to come from it, turning the creek red and making Stan draw back and hesitate. But, soon after, the clown raised its head from the water, its orange hair wet and stuck to its face. Its eyes were red, and filled with hatred, and its wide red lips were less of a maniacal smile than a glare.

“Son of a bitch! Why are you watching birds and planting flowers in this time string? I made you a fucking faggot, not a goddamned witch!” It yelled. Stan hesitated. That statement was really strange, and Stan was about to ask it to clarify, when it jumped up and raised clawed fingers at him.

“Die Stanny-boy! Die!” Stan flinched, but pulled himself together enough to start again with the owls.

“Great horned owl, Barred owl, Eastern Screech owl!” Stan roared. The clown flew into the air, then dived toward the boy but, just as with the bat, it slammed into some sort of barrier and bounced back with a great pained cry. The clown was now being torpedoed away from Stan, careening back into the creek and sending a pillar of water up into the trees. Stan followed the column of water to see that the birds on trees were no longer singing or bouncing from branch to branch as they had been. Instead, most were sitting still at a single point, and many more were making threatening squawks and hisses

at the clown that was writhing in the water. *The birds...are my friends...the birds...are helping me*, Stan thought.

After a few more seconds of wiggling and growling, the clown surfaced and shook its head, sending water everywhere and then it stood up and pointed angrily at Stan.

“You are channeling the eagle? This boy, this weak boy, is using Garuda’s wings? How? The eagle is supposed to be dead, broken like its lion brother when the Crimson King snapped that beam in half...” it hesitated, looking Stan over, then it clicked its tongue, “That fucking rat...the rat lied to me! I’ll make it pay. You can channel all your brothers through them, I’ll still kill these children!” the clown screamed this, then turning, splashed a few times in the water, then went under. The creek sloshed from the movement and waves from where it had been bounced off the banks, but slowly, the sounds of the normal flow of water and chirps and songs of the birds returned. Stan watched the slow moving water again for a few seconds, his book open and ready, but there was no response or reappearance of the clown. Stan breathed a few times, then looked at his shorts and thanked God several times for keeping him from pissing himself. Then, he recognized something. God had kept his promise. Or his end of the bargain. Stan had a way to protect himself, and maybe even his friends from...It.

“Stan!” Mike called, coming back down the hill, “Stan, I heard you yelling, but the chickens were really freaking out up until a few seconds ago. Are you alright?” Stan looked at him and held up the book to the boy.

“Mike...I think...I can stop it from hurting me...and hopefully you...” Stan said, beginning to laugh. Because he could protect himself. And that meant he wasn’t afraid of It anymore.

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Eddie was mad. Mad as in angry, not crazy. Because though he was going stir crazy, he was as irritable, frustrated and grumpy as he’d ever been. He couldn’t exactly pinpoint when this sour mood started. But it was around when he’d had the cast put on his arm. Eddie was normally a pretty sullen boy. He didn’t really like the mockery or

silliness of Richie...usually, nor did he enjoy the overly chumminess of Bill or Stan at times. But...something about the way his mother was doting on him, and keeping him in the house, had caused a spark rage that kept exploding.

Though he had angrily flung a few bottles of pills as well as yelled threateningly at more than one passing neighbor, his mother received most of the ire, in part because of her attempts to separate the boy from his friends. She had tried to lock up her sad little diabetic boy because he was hurt, badly, and had to be protected from more threats. And Eddie had responded by shouting at her, something he never would've imagined doing in his life before. But now he'd done it multiple times. Eddie had instructed her gruffly that he was not his father, and could survive his disease. He had also told her that he was going to die quicker without sunlight and exercise, and that her incessant worrying about him would probably kill the boy right there in that house. And, most importantly, he'd yelled, multiple times, that she was the reason his arm was broken and that he'd rather be out on the street with his friends than stuck in the house with her.

This last complaint was coming because of something Richie had discovered. Richie, the only person Eddie could see during his prison time with his mother, had snatched an encyclopedia from the library and they'd discovered what placebos were: bullshit, just as Gretta had told him. That mean his mother had made him take more medicine than he needed. Way more. In fact, the only real thing he needed was insulin. Everything else was bullshit. And that, in Eddie's mind, was how he'd become a weak, scared boy who had passed out when faced with a werewolf. Which led to his falling and breaking arm. And, in his current state of near constant acrimony, no amount of explaining by his mother could make that right. And as such, the Kapsbrack house was tense, and when the doorbell rang on the morning of what would be a hot, muggy day in mid-July, Eddie, who was in the kitchen stirring his oatmeal, quickly lifted himself up and started toward the door.

"I'll get it, Eddie..." Eddie's mother said, starting to get herself up from her loveseat. Eddie, however, held up his good hand.

"I got it, mom. Just stay in your chair..." Eddie said, a certain belligerence in his tone. He went past her and opened the door.



Richie was standing there, with a drawstring bag on his back Eddie assumed had *Trouble* in it. He was holding his bike, and nodded to Eddie.

“I...uh...thought maybe...you’d want to hang out. If...uh...”

“Yeah. I’m coming...” Eddie said, and walked back to the kitchen. He put the half-eaten oatmeal in the sink, checked his blood-sugar, then walked back to the door.

“Eddie...” his mother started, leaning forward in the loveseat. Eddie turned on her, glowering.

“I’m leaving, mom. I’m going with Richie. I don’t care what you say or what you want...”

“Eddie...just, take your fanny pack...for your insulin...” his mother leaned over and picked up the discard bag. Eddie eyed it, then snatched it from her and went out of the house. Richie watched him walk past, then leaned back toward the heavy woman.

“I’ll bring him back safely, Ms. Kapsbrack! I promise, I won’t let anything happen to your precious little boy!” Richie said, winking at Eddie, who rolled his eyes.

“Beep-beep Richie...let’s go,” Eddie said, pulling the fanny pack around his waist and clicking the plastic buckle into place. Richie nodded and pulled his bike out to the street. He got onto the front, then helped Eddie get on behind him.

“You okay?” Richie asked. Eddie slipped his unbroken arm tightly around Richie’s chest. And, as had happened the few times he’d hung out with Richie, the anger abated...somewhat.

“Yeah. I’ve got hold of you...” Eddie said. Richie looked back at him and smiled, then started to pedal.

“Very good then, sir!” Richie started, using his British accent, “Welcome about the Richie Tozier express. We offer a premier bike riding service at little to no cost, wot-wot and all that...” Eddie scoffed at the boy, but had to admit Richie’s voices were getting better. This one was almost passable.

"Where are we going today? Your house? The riverside? Or do you want to try the arcade again?" Eddie asked, recalling, somewhat grumpily that he'd caused his good hand and a few of his broken fingers a great deal of pain last time they'd played *Street Fighter*. Richie, however, cleared his throat, then spoke in his normal voice.

"Actually...uh...my mother told me I should really go hang out with Ben Hanscom. Apparently, he's called a couple times, usually when I've been out with you. And I...wouldn't mind seeing old Big Ben. At least for a little bit. Is...uh...that okay? To hang out with him? We don't have to, it can be just the two of us..." Eddie hesitated, then sighed.

"It's fine, Richie..." Eddie said. He took a deep breath and tried not to get too mad, especially about something so petty. Sure, he liked the other members of the Loser Club, but...Richie was special to him. And, over the past week and some, he'd really been reminded of how much Richie mattered. Which made it even stupider and petty that he was unhappy he'd have to share Richie by hanging out with Ben as well. But, Richie was right. It would be good see Ben and do things with some of the club again, "I'll hang out with you and Ben..."

"Good, because *Trouble* is funner with three you know. It says so on the box..."

"I think it says more fun with four. And Richie, you know *Trouble* is just like *Ludo*, the stupid game my mom used to make me play when I was little..."

"No, Eddie, the pieces are different. And so is the route...plus the die is in a sphere you smack! You know, a bubble you give a good gob-smashing to..." Richie switched back to the accent and Eddie sighed. He continued talking up the positives of *Trouble* in increasingly worse accents until they reached the Hanscom home. Which Eddie had to admit was stunning. Ben's home was a large, two story brick structure, with two tall chimneys, a big spacious lawn dotted with towering trees, and the entrance was marked with two tall columns that supported a beautiful second floor balcony. As they arrived on the well-manicured grass, Richie got off his bike, then he gently helped Eddie off before sending his ride rolling toward one of Ben's trees and turning to go to the front door. He raised a fist and started

banging on the big oak double doors before Eddie grabbed him with the un-casted hand and pulled him back.

“Are you crazy? Why are you going at his door like that?”

“Because...why do you care, Eddie?”

“Because I don’t want you to look like an idiot. Or a lunatic.”

“And I don’t give a fuck what I look like...” Eddie paused in his response, then dropped his eyes.

“You don’t care...even what I think?”

“Well, do you think I look like a lunatic?” Richie said, leaning in and giving his best lunatic glare. Eddie was off-put by the glare, but also by how close Richie was to his face. His heart skipped a beat before he leaned back himself.

“Well, Richie, when you do that...”

“Guys?” Eddie and Richie turned to see Ben had opened the door and was looking over the two, “Everything alright?”

“Yeah...” Richie said, standing up and giving a more normal smile.

“Swell...” Eddie said, still off-put by what just happened.

“Good! Welcome!” Ben said, then grabbed Richie around his arms and hugged him tightly, drawing a grunt from the smaller boy. “It’s good to see you guys!” Ben turned and held out an arm. Eddie, slowly, moved over to the boy and put the good arm around his big torso. It was so big...he was so muscular. Eddie was a skinny little twig and Richie’s body wasn’t much better, maybe more fat. But Ben...Ben’s body...was like a well-made statue.

“Come on in. Or we can go out...whatever you prefer...” Richie looked up at the bright, hot sun above them, then back at Ben.

“Well...since I’m going to have to sit through Stan’s Bar Mitzvah through most of tomorrow, I think I’d like a spot of air conditioning, if you don’t mind, dear sir...” Richie said, tipping a fake hat. Ben

looked him over then let out a laugh.

“That was almost a British accent. Come on...” Eddie followed Richie into the house slowly. While part of him was almost happy to be doing exactly the opposite his mother wanted, he also felt a little bad defying her so completely. The last time Richie, Eddie and Ben had been together, he’d broken his arm and nearly been eaten. But...he only felt a little guilty about that.

“Wow...” Richie uttered as he stepped into Ben’s house, “Whew, you got yourself a real nice living space here, bud...” Eddie agreed, walking slowly through what was a large living room, with two big white chairs, a matching couch on a fancy looking carpet. The room was defined by two long sets of stairs, one going up to the lower level, the other trailing down to what was probably a basement.

“Thanks...” Ben said, bouncing his eyebrows. After a moment, a short woman with thick glasses and short grey hair stepped into the room, holding a tray with glasses of lemonade. This was Arlene Hanscom, who held out the drinks and give the two boys a big smile.

“Welcome, boys. You must be Richie. And you, poor thing, must be Eddie. Oh, how is your arm, son...”

“It doesn’t hurt anymore. It just itches...” Eddie muttered. Richie smiled and grabbed both lemonades, then took a long sip from one.

“Hmm...this is really good. Nice and tart...” Richie put the other lemonade to Eddie’s lips, then the smaller boy grabbed the drink and pulled it away from Richie.

“Ahem...I got it, Richie...” Eddie said. Ben’s mom smiled and looked them over.

“Is there anything else I can get you? Some celery, or carrots? Or some fruit?”

“Fruit? Where’s the candy or cookies, sugar?” Richie asked. Ben stepped in front of his mom before she could answer and put an arm around her.

“Okay. Thank you, mom. I appreciate it...”

"Alright, Ben, you know I've got a Legion Auxiliary Women's meeting today, so I'll be gone most the day..."

"I know, mom. Have fun..." Ben said. Ben's mother turned one last time to Eddie and Richie and waved.

"Feel free to grab anything in the fridge. We don't have any candies or sugar in this household though..." Ben continued to escort his mother away, while Eddie and Richie watched.

"No sweets? How in the hell do you live like that?" Richie asked.

"Maybe you get a big, muscular form...like Ben..." Eddie said, taking a sip of the lemonade. It was tart, and not real sweet. In fact, it was almost like there was something else in it, one of those fake sweeteners his mother always grabbed for her iced tea the few times the Kapsbracks went out. Richie, however, clearly wasn't bothered by the taste, and drank back most of the lemonade, as Ben returned.

"Sorry, my mom gets real interested in my friends sometimes...so, what'd you bring Richie..." Richie, excitedly, opened his drawstring bag and revealed the board of *Trouble*, which Ben took a hard look at.

"This looks like *Parcheesi*..." Ben said. Eddie looked at Richie, who cocked an eyebrow at Ben.

"*Parcheesi*? The fuck is *Parcheesi*?"

"It's a game like...Nevermind. We can play that, let's go to the basement..." Ben led the two down the steps to a large space, with a bar to one side, a couch and chair placed in front of a big, new TV opposite it. To their right, windows and a glass door opened to the woods behind Ben's house. Richie took a look around and whistled.

"Shit...I'd love to live in just in this fucker...I'll be back with a sleeping bag, Ben..." Richie said. Ben let out a laugh, then led them to a coffee table. Richie didn't make it, instead stopping by a bookshelf filled with video tapes, "Damn, buddy, what are all these? It appears to be quiet ze collection,a, oui-oui!"

"Beep-beep..." Eddie said to Richie's French accent, though Ben turned back and started pointing out videos.

"My dad loves collecting his and my favorites. These are the fantasies, these are the comedies, these are my mom's..." Ben plugged his nose, pointing at a collection of romantic comedies Eddie would've minded looking over a little closer, "And these...are the horror movies..."

"Oh boy...*the Thing...Nightmare on Elm Street, Hellraiser...*what's this?" Richie reached in and picked out a video titled *Pet Semetary*.

"Whoa man, that came out this year. That's one of the scariest movies I've ever seen. It's based on a book and that author is messed up!" Ben said. Richie looked at the cover, and nodded with a smile.

"Let's do it..." Richie said, taking it over and putting it into the VCR. As he rewound the movie, Eddie moved to take a spot opposite the TV, hoping to miss most of it, and started to work on setting up *Trouble*. Soon, they were playing and Ben and Richie were watching the couch. Eddie mostly ignored the movie, though a few screams led him to glance back. The movie was easy to ignore for the first hour, though, after that, it became loud and engrossing to both Ben and Richie.

"It's your turn..." Eddie said. After a moment and a loud scream, Eddie reached over and slapped Richie's leg, which led the boy to hit the dice bubble and then look over his scattered pieces.

"Dammit, here..." Richie moved his piece quickly, then Eddie looked at Ben, who drew back and groaned.

"Good lord..." Eddie waited a moment, then slapped his leg too.

"Play!"

"I'm...hold on..." Ben said, then, something really dramatic happened, and both he and Richie let out a loud yelp. Eddie, refusing to turn around, stood up and sighed.

"I'm going to the bathroom..."

"Oh, okay. We'll pause the movie...I'm gonna get some popcorn," Ben said, reaching over and using the remote, "Down that hall and to the left..." Eddie sighed and shook his head, preferring the whole

movie finished while he was in the bathroom. Eddie went on in to the prettily done pink and blue room, then went through his fanny pack to get out a needle and his test strip. If they were going to eat popcorn, he had to keep an eye on his blood sugar, he supposed. He used the needle to draw blood from his broken arm's middle finger, then dripped a few drops onto a test strip, which he then jammed into a reader. He usually drew extra blood, as the reader often didn't work and at times needed multiple tests. This time, however, it registered, and he could see he had a normal glucose level. Eddie shoved all the equipment back into his fanny pack, then struggled with one hand to get himself out of his pants. Once he finally got to peeing, he sighed deeply and looked over at his broken arm and its cast, with LOSER written across it and Richie's big V drawn over the S. Richie drove Eddie nuts sometimes, but Richie was really a pretty good friend when it came down to it. He supposed he could let Ben sign or mark up the cast. As Eddie was thinking this and urinating, however, he heard a noise, almost a whisper, call his name.

"Eddie..." Eddie pinched it and turned around, and seeing nothing, resumed, only to have the call start again.

"Eddie..." This was a sing-songy voice Eddie knew belonged to that idiot friend.

"Richie, motherfucker, I'm pissing!" Eddie said, "Leave me alone!" There was a pause, then, a different sound, a much more muted Richie started yelling at the door.

"Eddie!" Richie called, "Why are you yelling my name? You need me to hold your dick for you?" Eddie felt a shiver run through him as it became clear that the voice calling him was different than the Richie outside the door. After a moment, the other Richie's voice returned, this time, coming from the drain of the sink. Eddie turned to it, a giggling and resonating tone that made Eddie shiver.

"Come on Eddie...let's go float..." Richie's voice said. Eddie shook himself off as quickly as possible, then grabbed the drain plug on the side of Ben's sink and slammed it in, shutting off the sound. Eddie, gulped, then flushed the toilet and rushed out back into the basement.

“Guys!”

“Eddie? Did you wash your fucking hands?” Richie asked. Ben looked the boy over and shook his head.

“That’s just gross man...” Ben agreed, crossing his arms.

“Wait, guys, wait...” Eddie struggled, but Richie flung a hand out at the boy.

“Also, Eddie, XYZ! We can see your boxers all jammed out through your zipper...”

“Guys, stop! The...the drain...it...” Eddie trailed off, as he turned to the TV, and saw that the main character, a middle aged man played by Dale Midkiff, was backing away from a large, king cobra snake.

“Ben...is there a snake in *Pet Semetary*?”

“Uh...I don’t remember one...” Ben said, “I hate snakes. Why wouldn’t I have noticed that? Where are we in the movie...” Ben started over to the VCR, and pressed the rewind button, but there was no response on the screen. Instead, Eddie saw the snake turn toward the three boys, and hiss, then writhed out of sight. And that made the small, diabetic boy start to whimper.

“It...It...the clown...is here...” Eddie said. Richie looked at him in horror, then turned back in time to see Ben go flying back from the VCR and over his coffee table, sending the *Trouble* board and the pieces with it flying. And Eddie started to hyperventilate as a king cobra snake slid out of the VCR.

“What the fuck?” Richie called, rushing to Ben and helping the boy stand. Ben, surprisingly cowered from the swaying cobra, but Richie picked up a shoe and held it threateningly at the creature.

“Too slow, Richie...” the snake uttered, slipping back into the VCR. Richie hesitated, his shoe still held high, then moved slowly toward the VCR and very carefully opened the slot to reveal only a video tape. Eddie looked around the room, but saw nothing else out of the ordinary. Eddie sighed and started to breath more normally, before he felt the fingers of a cold, undead hand slipped slowly around his



neck. Eddie let out a small whimper, then turned around to see it was Richie...sort've. The boy had his signature glasses, tee shirt and tight sports pants, but he looked more doll like, and had part of his face eaten by maggots, which crawled out of his face and made Eddie whimper.

"Come on Eds. Let's go float. Just us two. Together...forever Eddie..." Eddie looked at the doll of his friend, which sounded just like the boy, then back at the Richie standing next to Ben still focused on the VCR. He glanced again at the undead thing, which gave a big smile, and ran a hand across Eddie's face, then gripped his cast in a way that made Eddie start to whine with pain.

"Don't you want to be with me? Your best friend? Especially since It already got me...I'm already missing you know...but if you come with me, we can be together...we can float together, forever..." undead Richie's face was getting really, really close, and Eddie was struggling to make a noise. Then, the real Richie turned around and yelled.

"Hey! Get the fuck off of Eds!" Richie yelled. The undead doll Richie turned to him and let out a laugh. Eddie looked at Richie to see the boy hesitate, then he held up the shoe again, "Ugh, gross, it's you...er...me again..." Richie looked over the ugly version of himself, which clicked its tongue and smiled.

"You're dead Richie...you're going to be forgotten...and now, you're taking Eddie with you..." Richie's eyes grew wide and he started to screamed.

"I'm not dead! I'm...I'm not missing! No! No!" Richie yelled, then dropping the shoe. The other version of Richie stuck an arm out, which extended, dramatically and gripped Richie's throat. Richie was dragged across the room, and now, the doll Richie had become the clown, and he was holding both boys by the necks.

"I've got you both now...Eds here, and Richie-boy..." the clown said, giving them each a big smile. Eddie looked over the clown, desperate for something to help him. The clown revealed its big collection of teeth, and opened its mouth in a slow ominous way, when it's eyes suddenly darkened. It shut its mouth and looked over Eddie, its smile

slipping momentarily into a frown. After a few seconds more, the frown became a smile again, but Eddie noted that it smile looked different, like the monster was faking it. And that gave Eddie an insane idea.

“What...are you doing here, you ugly creature? You...made this time string for me...helped me change it...but...you are...here...helping him...fight me?” the clown uttered this slowly as Eddie reached down and unzipped out something from his fanny pack. He didn’t know what it was, but he assumed it was some extra placebo his mom had put in the bag. If he faked what it was, like imagining his inhaler had had battery acid in it, he might be able to hurt it. He picked the object up and aimed it at the clown’s mouth. But, it wasn’t his inhaler. It was the needle he’d used to check his blood sugar. That still had his bad blood in it.

“What is this?” the clown questioned, “Feeling a little light headed Eddie...need to check your...” the clown couldn’t finish, as Eddie jabbed the needle as hard as he could into the clown’s hand. It elicited a loud, horrible cry, and Eddie could see black liquid moving around where the needle meet it’s flesh, then the blood started moving up the arm, leaving a trail of decaying flesh on the way. The clown dropped Eddie and let out a cry of pain, then flung Richie into the approaching Ben.

“You poisoned me! You son of a bitch, you betrayed me!” The clown turned its head and pointed at Eddie, “You fucking Rat! I’ll kill your host, and drive you out of this world! This is my time string! I will survive, I will destroy the children, then I will help the Crimson King destroy your precious beams and tower, you ugly, awful...” the clown roared this at Eddie for a few moments, but he could see his bad blood was corrupting the clown’s flesh, and he watched it drive up the monster’s neck to its face. It let out a slight noise, then, it’s right eye exploded, sending blood and goo all over Eddie, leading the boy to scream.

Eddie cowered from the spewing liquid as the clown slouched, letting out a loud, painful sounding groan. It dropped both Eddie and Richie, then shuffled toward the bathroom behind them, blood leaking down its face as it swayed away from them. Eddie, covered in the gore, was hesitant to move, but Ben had jumped to his feet, and he was holding

a discus. He chased the clown toward the bathroom, but Eddie saw something small and brown, what he soon saw was the drain plug, come flying out of the bathroom and smack Ben in the face. It stunned the muscular boy, then Eddie heard the sound of something big flushing, so big, in fact, that it started banging against porcelain, on the verge of breaking it. It went down though, as he next heard the sound of something rattling against a metal pipe. And then, it was gone. No more sounds from the bathroom, no more clown in Ben's basement.

Eddie's breath started to slow, and he looked over his blood soaked shirt and pants, then at his cast, which, amazingly, was still white, other than loser with the V written over the S. Eddie looked back up at Richie, who was glanced over the boy and whistled.

"Well, you got him, Eds..." Richie said, leaning down, pushing Eddie's boxers back through his fly and zipping him up. Eddie glanced down at it, then at Richie, who bounced his eyebrows, "I suppose I'll have to undress you, and get you some new clothes..."

"It said something to me..." Eddie said, trying to recall the events of what had just happened, "It said...I was the host for something..."

"Host for what?"

"I don't know. But it called it a rat and said it betrayed it..." Eddie sighed, and slowly picked himself up, then raised his arms.

"Go ahead...I can't wear this bloody clothes..." Eddie said. Richie smiled widely, then gripped Eddie's shirt, purposefully tickling the boy's waist, "Ack, Richie stop!"

"Don't get too excited Eds!" Richie said, then jerking the shirt up, pulled it up over Eddie's head and over his cast. He was about to go for the pants when Ben stepped over toward them, a big gash across his forehead. Richie drew back and pointed at him in horror.

"Good God, look at this motherfucker! You're brains are spilling out down your shirt! Did you at least kill the clown?"

"I...no..." Ben looked at the shirtless Eddie for a moment, then

focused back on Richie, "But...it's hurt. Eddie...you got it good..." Eddie smiled, then signaled to Ben with his cast. And at that moment, he noticed that his anger...was gone. In fact, he was almost happy, even with his good clothes covered in evil clown muck.

"You, uh, have some new clothes for me?"

"Uh...yeah..." Ben started away, then turned back to Richie and Eddie, "By the way...Bill, Bev and I...we're building a dam..." Eddie looked back at Richie, who undid Eddie's belt and pulled it from the pants, causing Eddie to nearly fall.

"A dam? The hell you gonna do with a dam?" Richie asked, pointing at Ben with Eddie's blood soaked belt, "Where are you fuckers even gonna put it?"

"In the barrens...Bill...Bill's set on it..." Ben said, shrugging.

"We haven't built a dam since...me and Stan and you..." Richie signaled to Eddie, then he trailed off, "Bill wants to bring us back together, that son of a bitch, well, I think..."

"It will kill the clown..." Eddie said suddenly. It was a thought, the thought of whatever was...using or channeling through him. The... *rat*. But...it was true, he knew it, "We have to help build the dam..." Eddie said, letting Richie pull his pants off, "That's how we kill It."

## 5. The Dam

Bill stepped slowly into the synagogue, a big, white building with two tall spires on the façade and three big stained glassed windows. Bill couldn't really tell the difference between this building and the Methodist church his mother sometimes dragged him too, though, on the inside, there were decorations of various letters and words in the strange, Hebrew language and a big image of candles on one wall, but no pictures or images of ancient, pale, bearded men. Bill hesitated at the doorway, and very carefully picked up one of Stan's funny little hats and put one on his head. Under this, he was wearing a nice grey and black suit, the nicest one he owned, and hoped he didn't stand out too much.

Bill had been waiting at a candy shop down the street so that he didn't accidentally run into Mike, or especially Richie, before Stan's Bar Mitzvah. He didn't want to cause a scene during the day, even if what he needed them to do was so important. But, now that he was a few minutes late, Bill stepped in, trying to quietly move to an empty seat. Which was not easy, being that almost every single chair in that front room of the synagogue was filled. Far to the right, Bill could see Richie in a blue suit, his big, thick glasses reflecting the sun though the synagogue window. His mother was to his right, and all around him were no seats, every place was full or taken. However, Bill also noted Mike, and his mother and grandfather, were all on the opposite side of the room, and there were a few seats around them, empty places Bill suspected often followed that family around in mostly white Derry. Bill moved over to sit directly behind Mike, and it took the tall black boy several minutes before he recognized him.

"Wait..." Mike muttered, looking back, "what are you doing here, Bill?"

"Mike, hush!" Mike's mother said, putting a hand on his leg. Mike turned back forward and Bill leaned into his ear.

"I want you to come to the barrens this afternoon...you, Stan, Richie, Eddie if he can manage it..."

"Why?" Mike muttered back. Bill glanced up at Stan who was

standing next to his father, speaking in Hebrew. Stan turned and glanced in Mike's direction, giving the boy a smile. Then, Stan's eyes flicked behind him, and seemed to notice Bill. His smile slipped to a frown, and he leaned in the boys direction, perhaps trying to see if it was really him, before he got an elbow from his father. Stan quickly kissed the cloth wrapped around his neck and turned to the book in front of him and started speaking in Hebrew, glancing twice more at Bill.

"Why, Bill?" Mike asked again, a little louder. Bill leaned back to Mike's ear.

"We're going to build a dam...and I need your help," Bill said.

"A dam? In the barrens? What the hell for?"

"Mike!" his mother put a hand on the boys leg and held up a finger. Mike sighed and looked forward. Bill leaned back and remained quiet as Stan said the strange words, and kept kissing the cloth. Then, the Jewish boy was given the microphone, and he glanced at Bill before making some generic statements about being a man and everything that came with it. Bill thought for a moment Stan might've started complaining about how meaningless and useless the adults in the town were, but, he held off, perhaps because of a certain restraint Bill knew the effeminate and uncourageous boy had, but perhaps it had to do with the young black boy in front of him who kept catching Stan's eye. Finally, there was another set of prayers in the language given over Stan by his father, then the service ended with him dismissing the audience to a reception, and Mike's grandfather stood up quickly.

"Thank god, I've had to piss like a racehorse since they first started blathering..."

"Leroy!" Mike's mother said, "You're not representing us very well, here..."

"Bah, these Jews know who their friends are..." the man scooted past several groups of people toward a door. Bill watched him go, then Mike stood and looked back at the boy.

"Is this some attempt to get the group back together? Because this one sucks. Besides, what are we going to build a dam out of, sticks?" Bill was about to answer when he was suddenly grabbed by one side of his suit jacket and turned to see a furious Richie.

"The fuck you doing here, Bill?"

"I'm here to support Stan..."

"You weren't invited..."

"Apparently he was..." Richie and Bill turned to see Stan coming down the steps slowly toward the four. He was still in the robe and with the cloth around his neck. Bill thought he almost looked like a small version of his father as Stan let his arms hang to his sides, "My mom told me this morning Bill asked to come..." Mike eyed him, then looked back at Stan.

"Your robe looks nice. And so does this cloth. Looks like a fancy scarf..." Stan smiled at Mike and tugged on it.

"I...tried to make sure it stayed straight. Your...suit looks nice too..." Stan said. Mike nodded, then pulled on the black jacket that was too small for him. Bill glanced between the two, getting suspicious of the way they were complimenting each other before Richie shook Bill again.

"Why did you have to come? Why did you have to ruin this perfectly fine day?"

"Because, Richie. I need your help. I need all of you. Bev, Ben and I are going to build a dam in the barrens. And it's going to..."

"Help you beat the fucking clown. Yeah, yeah, Ben told me. But, did Ben tell you that Eddie and I kicked the shit out of the clown and it turns out we don't need your fucking ass?" Richie shouted. Stan looked back at his father, who was moving objects and books around at one side of the synagogue, then to his mother, who was with Mike and Richie's mothers at another door. Bill suspected they were waiting on the boys. Richie, however, didn't seem to care much.

"Guys...maybe we should do this...somewhere else...or some other

time..." Stan said. Mike put a hand on his arm, then looked at Richie.

"Richie, what do you mean, you kicked its ass?"

"Eddie and I and Ben...sort've. It attacked us when we were at his house, and Eddie stabbed it with a needle with his blood in it. The clown's fucking eyeball exploded!" Stan again looked back at his father and mother, who now appeared to be getting annoyed with him...or maybe with Richie's foul mouth. Stan shoved Richie, then looked at Mike.

"Guys! Not in here! I've...I've got to go in there...and talk to the people...I'll...see you guys later..." Stan turned around, and Mike grabbed his arm.

"We'll be in the barrens...we have a story about the clown too..." Mike said. Stan nodded slowly, then he and Mike started back toward a far door of the synagogue. Bill looked at Richie, who growled at him.

"Eddie...Eddie had some fucking vision, and now he wants to help build your stupid dam. But I'm not going Bill, you hear me, god-dammit!" Richie spat. Richie's arm was gripped by his mother, who looked somewhat embarrassed and also deeply irritated with her son, and pulled him gruffly toward a door. Bill watched him be dragged away, and held out a hand.

"I'm sorry Richie. I'm..." Bill started, but Richie flipped his middle finger at him as he was dragged away, and Bill sighed and walked out of the synagogue.

"How do I fix this? Somebody tell me how to fix this..." Bill asked, asked, though to a Jewish, Christian or some other celestial being, he didn't know.

About an hour and a half later, Bill, having changed into a tee shirt and sports shorts, was riding into the barrens on his bike, *Silver*, and stopped just on the edge of the small creek that poured into the sluice. He saw on the opposite side of the creek, Beverley and Ben's bikes were lying on the ground on one side, and under the shade of a nearby tree, the two were sitting together. They seemed to be talking



in easy terms about something: the large, well-sculpted Ben was sitting with his legs crossed, chewing on a pixie stick and laughing. To his side, also giggling, was Beverley, in all her beauty, her long brown-red hair blowing gently around her face, her long, summer dress a fantastic mix of green and white. The bright day softened by the shade was making the best aspects of her pale features stand out, and Bill was enamored.

Bill felt something for her: he'd felt it when they'd gone swimming with her in the quarry, when they'd cleaned the blood from her bathroom, when they'd been in the Neibolt house and she, with almost no hesitation, had skewed a werewolf. She was a mix of tough and femininity that made Bill's heart beat faster and his thoughts focus on her. He stared at her and admired the way her soft cheeks were defined by a few freckles, but also a little touch of blush. Bill wished he could reach out and stroke her face, but, he also knew there was no competition here. Ben was hulky, manly, and heroic; he was also intelligent, maybe the smartest of the group. Ben was a part of the Loser's club, certainly, but seemed made to challenge Bill, for leadership and Beverly's attention and it was making him question himself. Should Ben be leading the group, as Richie had angrily claimed back at Neibolt?

"Bill!" Beverley called with a wave. Bill, snapped back to reality, smiled back at her, putting his bike up and taking off his socks and shoes. Ben and Beverley already had them off, and they waded into the low water toward Bill.

"Okay..." Ben said, looking around, "I think we might be able to do it around here..." Bill, now in bare feet, stepped slowly into the water and felt the cool movement of the stream on his skin. He leaned down and picked up a rock, and moved it to about the middle of the creek.

"Then do it here..." Ben watched Bill move to grab another rock before he waved at the boy.

"You can't build a make-shift dam with random rocks! You're going to have too much leakage..." Ben said, putting a finger to his temple, "First things first, though, we've got to clear some space here," Ben waded to where Bill had put his first rock and picked it up, "Bill, you

and Beverley clear this area out here. Get the rocks and other stuff up on the bank or further downstream. I'm going to try to find something other than stone to build the dam with..." Ben said. He put a hand on Beverley's shoulder, then he waded out of the water, flung the rock down, and started up the east bank. Beverley and Bill watched him go, then Beverley leaned down and picked up another rock.

"Alright, I guess we've got to clear this out..."

"Right..." Bill went over and joined her. They moved the rocks and other debris for a few minutes before their hands touched each other. Bill drew back at first, then gave Beverley a small smile, and slipped his hand under hers to grab a small rock. Beverley looked Bill in the eye, and Bill thought he saw her cheeks begin to blush, then she dropped her gaze.

"You know, I'm not a very good girl, Denbrough..." Beverley said, moving on to another pile of stones, "That's what my mother says anyway. She says I have too much of my father in me, and that she can't seem to beat it out of me..."

"Why do you think that? That you're not a good girl, I mean...?" Bill asked, moving over to Beverley and helping her with the group of rocks in front of her.

"Because, I was never very good at...well...at being cute. Or trying to look pretty. My mother and I argue all the time about what clothes I wear and how much makeup to put on. I never cared that much how I looked, honestly, I'd rather go outside in the mud ..." Beverley flung a few rocks onto the bank and turned to Bill, "Or splash around a stream like this. Not do ladylike things. Or look nice doing them..."

"And...if I thought you were pretty...doing unladylike things..." Beverley looked at him again, the blush returning, then she let out a breathless laugh.

"I'd say you might think you're a charmer, Bill, but I've spent a lot of time telling off guys with charm like you. Especially since Henry Bowers told everyone that...I'd suck..." Beverley hesitated, then continued, "I'd suck a cock for a dollar. I don't even know how to do

it...”

“I never believed the rumors. And I don’t think you’d do it for just a dollar. I’d think you’d charge a lot more...” Bill said.

“Yeah, you’re right...” Beverly said, “I’d charge at least fifty dollars... though Henry Bowers couldn’t buy me for all the money in the world.”

“I’d probably charge a hundred. Not for him though. And I mean to suck...err be sucked...uh...” Bill struggled, trying make clear, even to himself, what he was trying to say.

“I get it. You’re not as cheap...” Beverley said, now giggling, “But... you are sweet, Bill...” Bill smiled widely now, feeling himself blushing too. He leaned down to grab another set of rocks, then Beverley waded over to him and gave him an unexpected kiss on the cheek.

“Heh...” Bill said, touching where her lips had been as though it was precious, “What was that for?”

“Being cute. You do it a lot better than me...” Beverley said. Bill hung on these words as they, over the next twenty minutes, finally cleared out the area. Soon, the water was moving somewhat faster and seemed to be pooling toward the middle of the bed. Beverley and Bill watched it, their feet drying out in warm, summer sun, when Ben returned, with Mike and Stan behind him. Both boys were now wearing their more normal outing clothes, polo and khaki pants for Stan, jeans and a short sleeve shirt for Mike. Both were pushing their bikes, which were dragging...what seemed to Bill to be junk. Mike’s bike had part of a car door tied behind it with a rusty chain, and Stan’s was roped to a tightly knotted set of wooden boards of different sizes. And Ben had a piece of metal that looked like it was once part of an animal pen under one arm and he was rolling an old truck tire.

“Wow...” Bill said, going back into the water and watching as Ben approached, “That’s...something...”

“Ben, what are we going to do with all this?” Beverley asked. Ben

winked at her, then glanced over to where they'd cleared out the water.

"This will work perfectly..."

"Ben, what the hell are we doing here?"

"I asked the same question..." Mike said, thrusting his bike forward with some strain, then dropping it and starting to undo his shoes. Stan also flung his bike with a grunt, then sat down to untie his. Bill could see he had a book and some binoculars with him, but assumed it was a story the Jewish boy would explain eventually.

"My mom was not happy..." Stan said, pulling his rather nice left loafer off, "She wanted me to pray and celebrate my manhood at home or with other Jews. But, she thinks I'm up with Mike at the farm, so..."

"And I told my mom I was going to celebrate all day with the Jews... which meant I didn't have to feed any goddamn chickens today..." Mike said, now with his shoes and socks off, waded into the water, "Oh...that's nice and cool..."

"Ben...what are you going to do with the..." Beverley started, pointing at the tire, but Ben, bounced his eyebrows and rubbed his hands together.

"Let's start with the boards. We'll set them upright, a stack of two. They'll be the core of the dam..." Ben quickly undid the tie around the boards, and then pulled a long one out and signaled to Bill. The boy took it, and followed his larger, more muscular counterpart as he waded into the stream. Ben carefully targeted his board, then jammed it, long-side up into the muck of the riverbed, then signaled to the other boys.

"Here, Mike, Stan, hand us two more..." Mike, and with a lot more hesitation, Stan, went and retrieved boards, which Ben and Bill took, and set up. There was enough board to make two layers two high, and soon, the water was starting to splash against the burgeoning dam. Bill was starting to feel strain on the boards he was holding up, and looked at Ben, who started snapping to the car door.

“Okay, that will be one of the supports. Bring it here...” Ben said. Mike, giving the boy a grumpy frown, went over, and with grunting, stretching and Stan’s help, freed the car door from his bike and dragged it over to the boards. Ben set it up, putting the door up like a strut against the upper boards. The door sunk into the mud after a few moments of pressure, then did not move. Ben, stepping back, smiled and put his hands on his hips, but Bill, who was still holding the boards on his side, growled at the increasing pressure against it.

“Hey!” Bill yelled. Ben, now alerted to Bill, moved over quickly to help him hold up the boards, and pointed at the tire, which made Mike groan audibly.

“Now we need that...”

“Of course you do...damn white boys...” Mike grumbled.

“Hey, it wasn’t the Jews...” Stan said. Mike smiled at him, and slapped his arm.

“Yeah, well, Ben and Bill’s type has been telling us what we can and can’t do a long time, huh?”

“Long as either of our kinds have been in this country...”

“Dammit, you two, I’ll get it!” Beverley said, going across the now drying out riverbed standing up the tire, “Equal work for equal rights...” Mike grunted loudly, then, despite his reluctance, moved to help Beverley get the tire into the creek, which Ben then directed to hold up the other boards. The tire was decidedly less stable than the car door, however, and started sliding over the muck, despite Beverley and Mike holding it up. Stan joined them in pushing the tire back, and once they got it to stop sliding, Ben let go of the boards and hurried over to sweep up the piece of metal and raised it just over the tire.

“Bill, I’ll need your help...”

“What are we about to do?” Bill said, grabbing the metal.

“Stab the metal into the center of the tire here...once it goes through some of the rubber, it should give the it strength and help the boards

not bend in too much...”

“You’ve got to be shitting me...” Bill said, then sighing, tightening his grip on the metal.

“Okay, we’re going to go on three...”

“Hurry up, the tire is slipping!” Beverly grunted.

“Right. One...two...”

“What the fuck are you all doing?” Ben and Bill hesitated on the stabbing, and all five looked up to see Richie pushing his bike down to the bank. And, amazingly enough, Eddie was riding on the bike, his good hand gripping the handle bars.

“Richie...” Bill said, surprised. Pleasantly surprised.

“You guys came...” Ben said, setting the metal aside and holding out a hand, “Eddie, Richie, welcome to the barrens dam...”

“Motherfucker, do something about his tire!” this came, surprisingly enough, from Stan, who, like Mike and Beverly around him, seemed to be putting a great deal of effort into holding the tire in place. Ben looked at him, then tried to grab the metal, but Eddie called to him.

“Wait...Ben...” Eddie slowly worked his way off Richie’s bike, revealing a set of spikes tied to Richie’s bike, “These might work better. My mother bought them to make a garden, but never used them...”

“Perfect!” Ben said, waving at Richie, who gave the whole group middle fingers before grabbing the stakes and bringing them over. With Ben’s strength and a nice, semi-circular rock for hammering, the group soon had the tire buried deep in the drying riverbed, and now, the water was beginning to build up against the boards. The Losers, now all standing together, admired the handwork, especially Ben, who was nodding to himself and pointing out features.

“That door should hold at least until tonight. And this tire might well keep up until next week. We’ll need to do more work on it...make it a bit higher so that it can hold up against the rising water ...and

probably create a runoff point upriver..." Ben said. Bill rolled his eyes, then looked at Beverley, who moved to Richie and Eddie and hugged them both.

"I'm glad to see you two. Bill didn't know if you were coming..."

"Blame Eds. I didn't want to come..." Richie muttered, giving Bill an ugly glare. He turned back to Beverley, and sighed, then hugged her back, tightly, "I am happy to see you though, Bevie..." Richie then drew a cigarette from his pocket, but before he could light it, Beverley slapped it away.

"Richie don't you know those are terrible for you?"

"Ugh, fine! Damn goodie-goodie..."

"I'm glad to see you too, Beverley..." Eddie said, trying to hug her awkwardly. Stan moved behind Eddie and hugged him, then Mike put a hand on his shoulder.

"It's good to see you out of the house. How's your arm?"

"It's okay. It itches..." Eddie muttered. He looked at Stan, then down at the binoculars hanging around the boy's neck.

"What are those, Stan..."

"These...are a way to protect us from the clown..." Stan said, looking down at them, then reaching and drawing a book from his back pocket. Eddie looked at him a moment, then unzipped his fanny pack, and took out a needle. Bill could see it was filled with a red liquid.

"I have a way to hurt the clown..."

"Is that your blood?" Mike asked. Both he and Stan were entranced, probably not in a good way, by needle and its contents.

"Yeah...and when I stabbed..." Eddie started, but Richie nearly shoved him aside and snatched Stan's book from him.

"Is that a bird watching book?" Richie asked, holding the book up

and keeping Stan from swiping it back, "I knew you Jews were boring, but that...well..."

"Richie, beep-beep!" Mike said, gruffly grabbing the boy's arm and taking the book back, then handing it to Stan, who gripped it tightly. Richie rolled his eyes as Bill tried to look at the book over Stan's shoulder.

"How does that work, Stan?" Beverley asked from behind Bill. Stan turned to give her a small smile, then opened it and pointed.

"When the clown attacked me a couple days ago—it was the bat again—I read from this, and..."

"Look what we have here!" A voice cut Stan off. The group turned to see three boys approaching them from the east bank of the creek. The one in front, Bill knew well. He was blond, with a terrible mullet, a tight, ripped tee-shirt, and crazy eyes that were willing to kill. It was Henry Bowers, and the boy stopped and leaned on a rock, drew a cigarette and lit it.

"This junk is blocking up the creek. Gonna flood this whole area..." this came from "Belch," a hefty, goofy looking kid who'd run with Henry since his youth. He reached forward and took the cigarette from Henry, who blew out smoke and gave a big grin to the group. The wind started to pick up as Bill stared the boy and his goons down, and he thought for a moment that God might've been lining them up for another showdown, this time with a storm to give it more character.

"Henry...haven't you learned your lesson..." Beverley asked, putting her hands on her hips, "You remember the last time you guys tried to face us?"

"Clearly you haven't learned yours, toots..." Henry said, moving toward Beverley. Mike, however, stepped in front of her and grabbed a rock.

"Henry...we kicked you and your friends asses before...we'll do it again..."



"Well, that's a new one..." Henry spat, pointing at the boy, "A black kid trying to define a white girls' honor. You don't see that everyday..."

"Fuck you, Henry!" Richie yelled, picking up a rock himself.

"Of course four-eyed fuck has something to say..." Vic, the third boy, said, giving Richie a dark glare, "Can't stop talking. I wonder how much you'd say if your little boyfriend, wheezy there, got his other arm broken..." Eddie moved behind Richie, who held up his rock angrily.

"And I wonder, if I fucked your girlfriend, would she still go back to your tiny dick!" Richie yelled. Vic's eyes turned dark, and he moved to Richie, but Henry held out an arm.

"Let the little faggot talk. He and girly boy and the Jew, those there fuck buddies won't do anything but talk..." Henry said, taking the cigarette back from Belch, "Old Bill here and his negro might try something, and that bitch isn't a pushover either. But, we'd still be able to take them..." Henry blew out the smoke, and looked at Ben, who was now cracking his knuckles and seemed to be gearing for a fight, "This is the motherfucker I don't understand. Big Ben, strong as a goddamn horse...cool at school, with people begging to be his friend, girls lining up, wanting to see if his cock is as big and muscular as his arms...but he doesn't take any of that. Instead, he joins this set of losers..." Ben had taken a few steps forward, ahead of Mike and his threatening rock, and Henry only had to take a few steps to get into Ben's face.

"I'm not a jerk. And I'm not a bully. You wanted me to run with you and your gang, to push guys like my friends here around. And I told you no. Made you real angry, didn't..." Ben was interrupted by the Henry shoving a switch-blade into his face.

"I didn't give a fuck if you wanted to join me. But I did care that you decided to join them. So I'm going to give you a chance to walk away from here, and leave them for me and my boys...or I gut you like a fish..." Ben seemed unable to move as Henry slide the blade down his neck. Bill took a few careful steps forward and picked up a rock, but, like the others, was hesitant to do anything with Henry so close to

Ben.

"I...won't..." Ben said. Henry smiled, then the blade started to slide down Ben's shirt.

"You kept me from carving into Billy Boy's chest there. I wonder... how would you like it if I carved my name into yours..."

"Your knife would break..." Ben said, coolly. There was a pause, then Henry looked up at Ben.

"Let's find out..." Henry drew back the knife, but Bill took this as an opportunity and threw a rock as hard as he could. It smacked right into Henry's face, stunning him, and giving Ben the opportunity to start retreating. Mike's rock went flying after, then Beverley, then Richie, then Stan, some crashing around the boys, some finding targets. Henry's glare turned crazier, and he sheathed his knife and picked up the rock that had hit him, which Bill thought might lead to another Apocalyptic rock fight, but there was the sound of a loud police siren, and Henry dropped the rock and his cigarette and ran. Vic and Belch glanced at the Losers, then ran themselves. Bill watched them go, then, he turned back to his gang, his friends, and began to laugh. It was clearly infectious, as the whole group was soon hooting and this only increased as the police car stopped near the edge of the barrens and Henry Bowers' father got out of his car and started chasing after the boy. There they were, in the dried riverbed, having built a successful dam, having beating Henry back again, and, most importantly, the Losers had reformed. For Bill this was a clear victory.

After the group's wild laughter started to finally calm down, an older, mustached office got out of the cop car and started to move over to the group, a limp in his leg. Bill recognized him as the friendly old Office Nell, though Mike, probably with good reason, was wary and moved back as the man approached.

"Alright fellas...and lady...excuse me...you all wanna tell me what you all are doing here? And what is this contraption?" the officer asked, looking over the dam. The group looked at each other, then Beverley stepped to the front and pointed.

"It's a dam, sir. We put a lot of effort into it..." Beverley said, stretching her arms slightly, "We were just working on it when Henry and his friends came down here and started calling us names..." Beverley, making herself look particularly frail and weak, leaned in to him, speaking just loud enough for Bill to make out, "Henry even had a knife..."

"Ahem...I'm sorry that happened ma'am..." Officer Nell said, then, eyeing Mike, pointed, "These boys aren't giving you any trouble, are they?"

"No sir. These are my friends. Bowers and his friends were the ones who were bothering me..." the wind blew Beverley's hair around her face, and made her look particularly attractive to Bill. He suspected that was probably part of the point, and Officer Nell tipped his hat to her as he spoke again.

"Well, I hope you all's day hasn't been ruined too much. Unfortunately though..." the Officer looked up at the sky, then back at the dam which seemed to start to be straining, though still holding the water of the creek, "I can't let you keep damming this creek up. It would create problems with the water flow and the barrens see..." Bill sighed and nodded, though Ben seemed particularly crestfallen by this announcement. However, Bill started to feel water getting into his eyes, and looked up to see that a big storm cloud was blowing in. And Bill...Bill sensed something was wrong.

"Officer...what happened?"

"What?"

"Bill! We should get out of here!" Beverley called, gripping Bill's arm, "Officer, this storm will probably knock over the dam. You won't make me stand in the rain and undo this, would you?" Beverley was still trying to look pretty, but it was getting a little harder with the wind blowing so hard and rain starting to come down.

"Well, I won't ma'am. You're probably right. You boys get on! 'Specially you!" the Officer said, pointing at Mike, who clenched his teeth, then Stan grabbed his arm and pulled him toward his bike. Richie was helping Eddie get back on his bike, and Ben, though

giving longing looks to the dam, was moving toward his bike as well.

“My house!” Bill yelled to the splitting group, rain starting to splash around him and his face, “Officer! What happened? Why are you here?”

“I...” Officer Nell hesitated, then looked down the path of the creek, down to the sewers, and beyond to... “There was a lighting strike! It caused a big fire...We think it killed a few homeless, because it blew up that old house on Neibolt street! We came down here to see if anyone who witnessed it had come this way...”

“Neibolt street...the house...the well...”

“The whole thing has crashed in on itself, no one can get to anything in there, we don’t know if anyone was hurt...” the officer said. His hat blew off, and he started after it, as the realization hit Bill. They couldn’t go after the clown, because there wasn’t access. They couldn’t get to him...which meant...they couldn’t beat him. He couldn’t make what happened to Georgie right...

“No! No! No!” Bill screamed into the increasing wind and rain. Beverley was now putting all her effort into pulling him, and finally, he turned away from the dam, and helped her onto her bike before riding after her on *Silver*, racing as quick as he could to his home. *The Losers*...Bill thought...*we’ve...lost.*

## 6. Stormy Weather

### Notes for the Chapter:

Hey!

Sorry I've been away so long. Work, school, you know the story. Anyway, hope you enjoy. Comments and Kudos are always appreciated.

Bill was staring out of the window, unmoving, watching the rain pour down the panes and splash in the window sill and outside. Beverley had to admit this was a pretty intense storm. And that storm seemed to be raging in Bill. Or something theatrical like that; her mother was better with all the melodramatic bullshit. Her mother was also better at comforting, so all Beverley could do was keep standing up and touching Bill when it was their turn.

Richie, who was clearly obsessed with *Trouble*, had found Bill's board and pieces, and had got the group to start playing. But, of course, only four people could play at a time, which meant Richie had made teams. Stan and Mike were having really bad luck with the die, and only had one piece out of start. Ben was doing slightly better, as all his piece had escaped start at some point, but Richie and Eddie kept sending them back, though, he didn't seem to be irritated by this, nor was he bothered by the fact Richie hadn't put him with any other loser for his team. That meant Bill and Bev were together, and they were actually doing okay in the game, but Bill had fallen back to his old listlessness, and could only barely be bothered to click the sphere.

"Bill...It's our turn..." Beverley said, her hand sliding down his arm. Bill stayed at the window a moment, then sighing deeply, turned and leaned down to the board, put a hand on the sphere to click it, then turned around and went back to the window. Beverley nodded, then went to the board and moved a piece forward, which sent Richie and Eddie's yellow piece back to start.

"Motherfucker, he doesn't even give a shit about the game and he's killing us!" Richie said.

“Dammit, Richie, let him alone...” Eddie said. Stan glanced back at Bill, then sighed, and looked at Mike, who looked at little depressed himself.

“Mike, it’s our turn...” Stan reached a hand out to him, but hesitated, then turned to press the sphere, bringing up a one, which moved their green piece one space.

“Why are we playing this stupid game?” Mike muttered.

“Something to do...” Ben said, hitting the sphere and moving a blue piece three spaces.

“Are we just gonna let the clown do what it wants? Since we can’t get to the house?” Mike said, then looked at Beverley and Bill. This question hung in the air for a while. No one answered, and there wasn’t any sound except the rain coming down the windows and pattering the roof of Bill’s house.

“We can’t get to the well...” Bill finally said, “That means...we can’t get to it. Which means...we lose...” Bill remained facing the window. Mike crossed his arms and frowned, which led Stan to reach out to him again, but the Jewish boy thought better of it. Beverley looked at their group, pitiful, defeated, and playing a game she was sure was just like *Sorry* except with dice instead of cards. Beverley sighed, feeling part of her accepting the hopelessness of the situation. But then, a part of her suddenly resisted, and started after what Mike might have been getting at.

“The house is destroyed, which means we can’t go in the well, yeah...” Beverley said, then touched Bill gently, “But, the clown isn’t in the well, it’s in the sewers right? We can still go into those, assuming...”

“They’re flooded now, Bevie...” Eddie said, “We can’t go in safely...”

“And where would we go in? The clown...killed Bill’s brother in a drain hole...” Stan said. Beverley looked at the two, then to Ben who nodded.

“Patrick Hogstetter tried to chase me and Bill into the sewers, and he

was taken too..." Ben said, glancing at Bill, then back at Beverley, "I've come to believe his problem wasn't that he couldn't fight the clown, he had a flamethrower with him for God's sakes. He just couldn't get out because he was lost..." Beverley sighed. These were good points. And Mike was grumpy and wasn't ready to help her. But, Beverley did notice that something was different about the way they were talking. It seemed like the group was operating on the tacit agreement they would get together and fight the thing, if they could. They just couldn't....but if they could..."

"What if we could figure out a way not to get lost? And as long as we stick together, the clown can't get us like Patrick..."

"But...the sewers aren't even mapped correctly..." Bill said this, turning to look at her. Beverley met his gaze, then Ben cleared his throat.

"Remember, Bev? Bill's dad's maps, when we projected them over the town maps, they were all messed up and outdated. The earthquakes...the ones that happened around when we were born, we suspected they might have caused the changes, remember?"

"Then...the clown burst out of the screen..." Stan murmured.

"But, Eddie led us to Neibolt street and that clown's tunnel anyway... if we went in somewhere else, at a manhole, or at the barrens..." she trailed off, again starting to accept that it was over. The clown had protected itself from the Losers. Because they didn't have a good plan. Beverley was about to turn back and take their hit the sphere again when Richie sat up, looked at the board in front of him, suddenly flipped it over, and jumped to his feet.

"If we there, in one of those places, then what?" Richie said. Bill turned around, and now seemed irritated.

"What? Richie, what are you..."

"She said," Richie started, pointing at Beverley, "If we went in somewhere else...what if? Who's to say we can't figure out how to get out?"

"But...Bill's brother...and Patrick..." Ben started again, but Richie held up a finger to him.

"We won't go in a fucking storm drain, fine. But there are other ways in the sewer," Richie looked over the group, then at Beverley, "You know what? Beverley is the only girl here, and yet, she's the only one who isn't being a pussy right now..." Richie turned to Bill, "Bill, you made us fight the fucking clown in the first place. And now, you can't do it because you can't get in the sewers the way you wanted to?" Richie put his hands on his hips, and shook his head, "We only found that goddamn house because of Eddie. And you know what? I bet Eddie could get us into that sewer again!"

"I, what?" Eddie looked at him, and Richie nodded.

"You got that compass jammed in your liver, killing you. It works man..."

"Richie, I got you guys lost in that Neibolt house!"

"The fuck you did! We got the shit kicked out of us, but you knew where we were and where we needed to go...right?"

"I...I mean...until I fell down, but..."

"But what, Eddie?" Richie yelled, then looked up at Bill. Beverley saw, for the first time since she'd meet and understood the dynamic between the two, that Richie was looking at Bill with trust. There was still irritation in his eyes, but there wasn't the hate or anger that she saw so often in his glimpses, "If Eddie can get us in and out of the sewers, you can lead us to fight the fucking monster." This led Mike to turned to him and stand up himself.

"Yeah. And if Eddie's guiding us..." Mike started, pointing, "Stan can keep us protected..."

"Mike, I..I don't know if that's going to work the right way again..." Stan muttered.

"It will Stan. And once we've got your shield around us, I'll shoot that thing with as many captive bolts I can load in my pistol and kill it!" Mike said.



“And I’ll stab it with your blood, Eds. If we put enough in it, we can cause it’s head to explode!” Richie said. Eddie looked less excited about this, but Ben was tapping his chin.

“I suppose...” Ben was now leaning back from the board, “We could use the entrance near the track field. There is a big manhole there, really large. If we can work it up...We can go in there, and go out in the barrens. And, I have been training to hit the thing with a discus... If I flung it right, I could probably at least stun it, if not knock its head off...” Beverley nodded, then looked at Bill.

“Plus, Bill...if...if it becomes a werewolf again, I can hurt it. This time for real. I have some silver dollars, from my grandfather...We could use them in a sling shot. They would be like slugs...”

“Even better...we could make them into slugs...” Mike said, “I can use one of the farm’s furnaces. We could melt it...”

“Yeah, and forge weapons of war!” Richie said, trying to speak in a voice which might have been a video game narrator. A bad, poorly trained narrator who had to keep clearing his throat to keep his voice low, “Chose your weapon. Eds’ blood, Stan’s book, Mike’s gun, Ben’s disc, Bev’s coins...”

“Beep-beep...” Eddie muttered, then sighed, “But...I suppose, I might be able to get us out. The water pours out into the barrens. And there aren’t that many routes...”

“And that means...we can do it, Bill. We can get to it, we can kill it, and we can get out...” Beverley said. She stared into Bill’s eyes, his soft green ones searching hers.

“She’s right...We can do this, Bill...” Mike said. Beverley turned to him, and saw him standing, nodding. Stan, who was still sitting, seemed unhappy, but resigned to help. Richie and Ben both seemed eager, and even Eddie glanced at her and nodded slowly. Beverley smiled at them, then looked back at Bill.

“We can. But, we need all seven of us to do it. If we don’t have the whole group...it won’t work...you said so, yourself...” Bill looked her over one more time, then, something appeared to click, and his face

suddenly became determination.

“Okay. Let’s do it. Let’s kill that fucking clown...”

“Yeah!” Richie yelled, then slapped Eddie on the back. The smaller boy roiled from the hit, then held up a hand.

“Wait, wait...” Eddie said, “Get me...a day. To draw enough blood...”

“Yeah, I’ll need to get my pistol...” Mike said, “And I’ll make the slugs...If you...” Beverley nodded to him, and held out two silver dollars, which he put in his pocket.

“I need my discus...too” Ben said, “I’ll probably want to scout out the area, just make sure it’s an accessible manhole...”

“We can’t go while its raining, anyway...” Stan said, looking out of the window at the storm that had diminished to a drizzle, “But... maybe tomorrow...”

“Tomorrow...” Bill said. Beverley smiled at him, “Meet at the track. Noon, so Ben has plenty of time to scout, and everyone can get their things...”

“Tomorrow...” Beverley said, “We beat he clown once and for all...”

They split up after, the other Losers risking the rain, but Beverley and Bill stayed at his house through the drizzle, which stopped just after the sun set. After this, Bill started to walk Beverley home. They pushed their bikes, and talked about unimportant things until they arrived outside her apartment building. Beverley could see a lamp light on, meaning that while her mother was home, she was probably already asleep. Beverley, therefore, hesitated at the steps, and turned to look into Bill’s eyes.

“You know, Bill...I’m glad...that we’re friends...” Bill smiled, and reached out to touch her hair.

“I’m really glad to. And I wish...I could tell you how pretty you are. Ben’s poetry on his postcards is a lot better at that...”

“Yeah...but, it’s okay...I appreciate your compliments, even if they

are simple..." Beverly said. Bill smiled, then leaned in to kiss her cheek. But she didn't let him. Instead, she moved at the last second so that their lips met. It was short, just a peck, and Bill drew back quickly, but it was so sweet.

"I...Beverley..."

"Good night, Bill..." Beverley said, giving him a grin. She went up the stairs to her apartment, opened the door, and went inside. As expected, her mom was sleeping on the couch, and she leaned and gave her a peck on the head before moving to her room and going to bed, closing her eyes, and playing the sweet, sweet kiss over and over again in her mind.

Her sweet, sweet, dreams of her and Bill were rudely interrupted when she heard the quick bangs on her door she knew was her mother. Beverley's eyes flicked open, and she could see that the sun had just started to rise.

"Beverley, I need to talk to you! That boy! The boy you kissed, he's back!"

"What? What time is...which boy?" Beverley sat up. Her mother hadn't seen that, had she? Would Beverley ever get to see Bill again? She started to panic and breath heavily as she lifted herself from her bed.

"You know, Bev! Him, that real bad one. Bowers, I think..."

"Oh...shit..." Beverley muttered, then got up, pulled off her sleeping gown and pulled on a dress. She started brushing her hair as she opened the door and revealed her very angry mother.

"I didn't let him in, but he won't leave...and I have to go to the restaurant, Beverley!" Her mother said. Her eyes flicked to Beverley's hair, then she snatched the brush from the girl and started roughly straightening it out, "You still don't know how to make yourself look nice! As much as I've..." Beverly jerked away from the woman and grunted.

"Ugh...Mom! I can brush my own hair!" Beverley pushed past her

and went to the bathroom and shut the door, "I'll deal with Henry. Let me at least piss first..." Beverley grumbled. Her mother clicked her tongue at the girl, probably for her vulgarity, but Beverley heard the overbearing and sometimes abusive woman start down the steps. It wasn't that bad...living with just her. At least, that's what Beverley told herself. Beverley wasn't a good lady, and her mother wasn't a great mother. But they muddled through...and she wouldn't change it for a lot of things. Like having an abusive father...that would be terrible. Beverley sat down on the toilet, started peeing, trying to think about how she might tell Henry Bowers off, when there was a loud noise. Beverley finished up, then stood up and went to the door.

"Mom?" Beverley asked. There was another noise, then her mother's voice rang through the apartment.

"He left, Bev! I'm going to work! No boys in the apartment!"

"Okay, I know, Mom!" Beverley yelled. There was the sound of her front door closing as Beverley started to wash her hands, then she opened the bathroom, and nearly fell as Henry Bowers was standing in the doorway. Beverley could see the window open behind him, and suspected the boy had climbed up through the fire escape.

"Hey, Bevie..."

"Son of a bitch!" Beverly yelled, stumbling back. Henry grabbed her arm, and pulled her close to him. Beverley could see that something that looked like blood was splattered all across his neck and shirt.

"No boys in the apartment, huh? I think your mom will make an exception for me..." Beverley now felt true panic rising in her. Her mother had just left, and the Losers weren't meeting until noon. And she could feel him stiffing against his pants he pulled her close. And all that meant Beverley was in trouble.

"My mom is really strict... about that rule..." Beverley said, trying to pull her arm free. But it wasn't working, because Henry was gripping her too tightly. And, his hardness was pressing even more into her.

"Bevie. Why don't you make an except for me...Why don't we...have a little fun, before I put a fucking knife into those Losers you hang

out with...”

“Henry...Henry please...” Beverley tried, pulling away and trying to look weak. Henry keep gripping her though, and soon had her against the bathroom wall.

“Everyone already says we’ve done it. Why don’t we make the rumors true?” Henry said. Beverley tried to hold in tears, then she looked at him and sighed.

“Okay Henry. Let me...Let me go. So I can take off my dress...” Henry smiled widely, then moved his hand to her dress sleeve.

“I’ll take it off for you...” Beverley took a step back as his rough fingers traced along the seam, then, with all her might, she kicked Henry in the groin. Henry yelled in pain, gripping himself.

“You crazy bitch!” Henry cried. Beverley, survival instincts now in control, rushed to the toilet, grabbed the tank cover and swung it as hard as she could at the doubling over boy. It slammed into Henry’s head and sent him sprawling back, crashing into the wall of her apartment, blood and porcelain pieces spewing everywhere. Henry slouched against the wall, unmoving, and, Beverley, in disbelief with what she had just done, dropped the top and tried to control her rapid breathing. Was that who she was now? Was she willing to hurt...maybe kill somebody like this...in cold blood? Beverley didn’t regret it at all. She accepted, completely, that hurting, maybe fucking killing Henry Bowers was acceptable...but who the fuck’s blood was that on his shirt?

“Shit...” Beverley muttered, “My mom is gonna kill me...”

“Not if I kill you first...” Beverley turned to the shower, pulled the curtain back, and the clown was there, smiling widely, Its orange hair wild, Its red nose shiny and blood on Its neck and chest, just like Henry. The clown flung its hand out and grabbed Beverley’s throat, gripping her tightly and lifting her into the air.

“Oh, Bevie...you just couldn’t keep yourself from doing something crazy, could you...seems it doesn’t matter, father or mother, you’re still a crazy bitch. Oh well...this time, just like the last one, I’ll...” It

stopped suddenly, the excited smile on its face slipping to a frown.

“Wait a minute. Dammit, I did this last time...that ugly, stinking rat is trying to trick me...” It looked over the squirming Beverley a few moment, then, its horrible yellow eyes lit up, “I’ve got a better idea. You...Beverley...can get me something better...” the clown leaned in, its terrible mouth inches from her face, and its terrible breath on her face, “How about...Bill...” Beverley started trying to fight against the creature with all her might. *No! No! She couldn’t let that happen! She couldn’t let Bill be taken, not now...*

“Let’s give him a little scare...” It said, moving close to Beverley’s face, “Give me a scream!”

“No!” Beverley choked out, trying to fight, trying to resist him. The clown smiled widely, then it got in her face, and with a loud crack, the sound of flesh and bone being ripped in half, it’s head split in two, blood, brains and gore spilling all over the girl. And Beverley... screamed.

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“Beverley!” Bill was racing again time. He knew. He just knew. He had to get to Beverley before the clown took her. And he knew why. The Losers had to have seven, yeah. Beverley was a part of their group, one of his friends, sure. But...there was something else. Beverley...Bill loved her. It was like, they were bound to love each other, across time. And he wouldn’t let anything happen to her. He couldn’t. He slowed *Silver* just enough to turn a corner, and nearly flung himself off his bike. He tried to slow down his riding, just enough to think rationally what was happening. Something was wrong, sure. But what? Why was Beverley threatened? And what could Bill do about it? He didn’t know. But he knew he had to go there, and so, he sped *Silver* as quickly as he could to her apartment. He jumped off the bike and raced up the steps to a door that wasn’t locked, shoved it open, and hurried through the main room to the back hallway. And he stopped in his tracks, panting, eyes wide, unable to speak. There, slumped against one of the walls, was what really seemed like the dead body of Henry Bowers.

Bill hesitated, then approached the boy. His hair was messy, and

blood was splattered across his scalp and shirt and was dripping down his face. He wasn't moving, and across the carpet in front of him were pieces of porcelain. Bill was tempted to try and check his pulse, but after a moment, he decided he'd give the boy—or maybe body—a lot of leeway. Bill had heard from one of his elderly neighbors that Japanese soldiers in WWII had sometimes played dead, then would come to life and try to bayonet the Americans that found them, and Bill decided he'd rather not risk it.

Just before he was about to pass Bowers, Beverley burst out of her bathroom, stumbling forward, her hair frazzled, her dress torn and marked with blood, and her eyes bloodshot.

“Beverley!” Bill yelled, rushing forward. Beverley turned to him, and drew back.

“No! Bill! Run!” Beverley cried, then a long white, frilly gloved hand stretched out and gripped her neck, then pulled her back into the bathroom.

“Beverley!” Bill roared, bounding in after her. Just as he stepped into the bathroom, that opposite hand gripped his neck, and with great force, flung Bill back into a wall. He squirmed as the clown, a big, horrible grin on its face, walked over to him.

“What’s up, B-b-b-bill?” the clown asked, giggling. Why was the clown mocking him like that? It didn’t make sense. Bill thought about it a moment more, then he noticed that Beverley was on the ground, the clown’s foot on her mouth and holding her down.

“Beverley...no...” Bill said. He looked back at the clown, then, summoning as much energy as possible, took a swing at its face. The punch landed, but Bill found the flesh soft and squishy, and the clown’s head seemed to melt, swallowing up his hand, the stupid giggling still ringing in his ears.

“Bill!” Bill turned to see the foot was off the girl’s neck, and she jumped to her feet, but the clowns...goo or whatever it was, was consuming Bill’s arm.

“I’m sorry...I...”

“Bill, no! Bill!” Beverley tried to pull and scratch at the clown, but Bill was trapped. The form, now a mix of white, orange, and black, slid up around his shoulder, then torso, and after a few seconds and a low growl, it overtook his face. And Bill couldn’t see anything but utter darkness.



## 7. Guardians

### Notes for the Chapter:

Hey, so this is going to include a mix of Steven King lore in with a modified IT plot. It might seem a bit funky, but remember I didn't actually make most of this stuff up. Steven King owns it all.

Ben stopped his bike suddenly. He was just a block from the track, where they were going to meet. He could see it. He'd gone early to scout like he was supposed to. It was only just 10, and the other Losers wouldn't be there until 12. But...something...something was telling that he had to go back. Or...go there. To Beverley's apartment. Something horrible had happened. Ben turned his bike, sliding smoothly back down the streets he had come from, and was soon racing toward her home. *Hang on Bevie!* He thought, *hang on!*

Ben slowed and got off his bike as he arrived outside her building. He started to her apartment when Beverley burst from her front door, dress torn, hair a mess, and with blood on his hands and face. She looked back and forth, then turned to Ben, who rushed to her side.

"Beverley! What happened?" the girl, who was beginning to sob, threw her arms around Ben and gripped him tightly.

"It got Bill!" Beverley cried. Ben paused, then his heart sank. Bill... Bill was a cusp. Whether Richie or anyone else liked it or not, the Losers were based around him. What could they do if...if he...

"Ben!" Beverley leaned back, but still gripped his arms, "We've got to get him back! We've got to go find him!"

"But...how?"

"We..." Beverley hesitated, then gripped him tighter, "We do the same plan! Into the manhole by the track! And we get him from the sewers. Let me change and grab my things..."

"But the other Losers won't..." Ben struggled out, but Beverley was

already racing back into her home. It was only a few minutes before she returned, slamming her door behind her, in a new dress, her purse slung around her shoulder. But, the way her hair was tied back, the way her new skirt flowed around her knees on that windy day, the way her face was the model of determination. Ben felt like it was more than he just liked her. He was falling in love.

"I...you look..." Ben started, then, there was the sound of a bike being thrown aside, and Ben turned to see Stan running toward them, panting. The boy was in the least nice clothes he probably owned, a disheveled and worn out polo, older cargo shorts and a loose and scuffed belt. He looked over the newly changed Beverley and after taking a few deep breathes, he held out a hand to her.

"I...Beverley, what happened? Are you okay?"

"Stan...I'm fine, but Bill...Wait, why are you here?" Beverley asked. Stan hesitated, then she shook her head and put a hand on the Jewish boy's arm, "Bill was taken! By the clown. He used me as bait. I... we...we have to go get him..."

"Okay...but...how?" Stan asked. Beverley looked at him, then at Ben, who pointed in the direction of the track.

"We think he was taken down into the sewers. Like his brother..."

"So...we would still have to go in the manhole..." Stan muttered, now appearing unsteady. Ben was about to respond when he was interrupted by the sound of another bike thrown aside, and Mike hurried over, looking around. He had a captive bolt pistol holstered on his side and additional bolts wrapped around his shoulder.

"Beverley!" Mike yelled, "Are you okay?"

"Mike, Bill's been taken!" Stan said. Mike shook his head in shock, but Ben was trying to solve another mystery. Why had Stan and Mike come to Beverley's apartment?

"What are you....doing here?" Beverley asked Mike, then glanced at Ben, clearly trying to figure out the same thing. She tapped her chin and raised an eyebrow, "Did I put out the bat signal? Why did they

come?”

“I...I felt like I had to come. Something was wrong...” Stan said. Mike nodded in support, then there was a loud yell, and the group turned to see Richie, with Eddie riding on the bike behind him, speeding toward the group.

“Wesa coming Bevie, missus! Wesa gonna get you saved, sugarpea!”

“Beep-beep, Richie! And don’t do that in front of Mike, you idiot!” Eddie called as Richie slowed the bike, let Eddie off, then flung it aside and grabbed Beverley’s hand.

“Why, I suppose I’ll just have to be a dame then!” Richie said, now in that horrible southern woman accent that Ben thought was pretty insensitive too, “Tell me, my dear, whatever might be the problem you’re facing?” Beverley looked over Richie, then snatched her hand away and shoved him back.

“Richie. Why did you bring Eddie here? How did you know?”

“Well, darling, my lovely partner here told me...”

“I told Richie that we needed to turn down this street,” Eddie interrupted, “I felt it. In my gut...or liver. Wherever the compass is...”

“What? What could have...” Beverley looked over the Losers for a moment, “How?” Ben looked at her, and reached out a hand to her. She didn’t shy away as his fingers slid up and down her back. She was clearly trying to think as her eyes flicked from Stan and Mike to Richie and Eddie, “We...we’re being guided...”

“Guided by what?” Ben asked. Beverley looked at him, rubbed her head, then sighed.

“I don’t know, and I know it sounds crazy. But I think something is trying to help us kill the clown. Eddie, the monster, It...said something to you about a host, and a rat?”

“Yeah...” Eddie said, hesitating, “It said that the rat betrayed it and was using me to poison It...”

"It said that to me too...sort've..." Stan started, "It said that I was being protected by something called Garuda..."

"So...you think the clown was telling the truth? That some...things... beings, whatever, are protecting us? Helping us fight?" Ben asked.

"Look...the book and the blood are powers we can't explain. And all of you came to my aid, without me having to call you..."

"Well...we're fighting an evil, fucking shape-shifting clown. I suppose a heavenly rat and his ally, Garunsdal, could be saving us..." Richie said, pretending to sound intelligent. Or maybe it was a voice. Either way, Beverley seemed was about to tell him off, then paused, and turned suddenly, looking past the boys. In the direction of the track and beyond, the manhole.

"Guys...we've got to go...now..." Beverley said. Ben hesitated, then he felt it. It was almost like a spark passing through him. Ben suddenly knew it too...they did have to go at that moment...or it would be too late. It took only a couple seconds before it hit Stan and Mike, as they both turned to the track as well.

"You're right...we need go...or Bill..." Mike started.

"Bill will die!" Richie suddenly yelled, then grabbed Eddie roughly, "You got your blood? We got to go now!"

"I've got it!" Eddie yelled back, jerking out of the boy's hands. He signaled down to his fanny pack, then looked back at Richie, "I'm ready..."

"Good...I'm going to shoot the clown with this..." Mike drew and brandished his captive bolt pistol threateningly. Ben glanced at Stan, who drew his birdwatching book and flipped it open, though the curly haired boy looked far from certain about their chances. Finally, Ben moved to the bag on his bike and opened it to show the four discs he had ready.

"Well, folks, it looks like we're ready for the big fight!" Richie said, really drawing out the word *big* as he switched to his terrible "narrator" voice. Mike looked at him, then shook his head.

“Not quite. Here, Beverley!” Mike reached into his pocket and pulled out two small, round balls. He tossed them to her, and Beverley caught them deftly. As she looked over them, Ben could see that it was a melted down silver dollar, now a silver slug, which made Richie turn and grab Eddie’s fanny pack.

“Oh, of course. Here Bevie. I got something for you...” Richie roughly unzipped the pack, and drew a slingshot. He tested the sling briefly, then tossed it to the girl.

“This is for you! I found it up in messa attic, missum. Fer dem dere slugs! Now, listen missum Beverley, you oughta’ aim carefully, we ain’t got a lot of extra slugs or slingshots, ya know, yes ma’am, missusm...”

“Beep-beep, you stupid jerk!” Mike yelled at the boy, brandishing his pistol. Richie recoiled and Eddie pulled away from him and zipped up his pack, shaking his head in irritation. After Mike turned to mount his own bike, Richie bounced his eyebrows at the smaller boy, then pushed him to his own ride. Eddie, grumbling, obliged, getting on and waiting for the kid with his racist voices to get on behind him. Stan jumped on his bike too, then Ben looked at Beverley and nodded.

“We’ll get Bill back. We’ll get it done. And I’ll keep you safe, I promise...” Beverley sighed at him, smiled, then leaned in to kiss Ben’s cheek.

“Thank you...” Beverley whispered, then moved to her bike, slingshot and slugs now in her purse, “Alright, Losers, let’s go get Bill and kill that motherfucking clown!” this was met with a cheer from the boys, then Beverley sped forward on her bike, Ben, Mike, Stan, Eddie and Richie in tow.

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“Bill...Bill...B-b-b-bill...” Bill’s eyes flicked open to see he was lying on back somewhere...dark. But not totally dark. Somewhere way above him, Bill could see a distant light, what he assumed to be a fake light or a remote opening. The strong but far-off illumination made—wherever he was—feel cold and ominous. He listened for a

moment, and he could hear that he had to be near water, the sound of liquid draining resonated around him, and a cool mist dusted his face. The mist didn't smell bad, but it didn't exactly smell good either. As he slowly lifted himself up, he felt wind blow around him and gently move the bangs on his forehead. Bill had his hands on a hard surface, which he surmised was concrete, then worked his way to standing up. As he took in the sight around him, his unsteadiness was only made worse. He was in the sewers: there was a reservoir to the left of him, and a raised one to his right. Two different pipes poured into each, which explained the loud splashing. And, beyond the water in front of him, Bill could make out that the space opened up, like a cavern, and in the center of that cavern was a massive pile of...things. Specifically, the things of children: toys, games, sports equipment, bikes, clothes, wagons, and even some furniture, like cribs and kids' beds. Bill looked over the nightmare, then, he felt his heart drop and his eyes began to well up. Because in the center of the pile, over what looked like an old circus wagon, was Georgie's boat.

Bill tried to tell himself it could have been any kid's boat. Or that because Georgie's boat floated down here, didn't mean that was his fate. But, in his heart, he knew it was Georgie's...and that Georgie had been killed by the clown. Then, over the roar of the draining pipes, Bill started to hear music...

"Oh...poor Bill...too soon? Is it...too much for ya?" this boomed through the cavern, and Bill looked around to try and find a source. The only thing he could tell, however, was that the old circus wagon had started playing music. It was a strange wagon, really old, and with a stage on the side, like what might be used for a puppet show. And the music, Bill thought it might have been for a carousel, except slowed way down, which meant it sounded a lot more menacing. Trying to keep his breath steady, Bill started to move with staggering steps toward the stage, stepping into and sloshing through thick water he really hoped was neither human waste nor blood. Then, Bill could make out the words on the stage. *Pennywise, the Dancing Clown.*

"You...you killed him! You killed Georgie! And I'll kill you!" Bill grunted. As he splashed his way toward the stage, the music grew in volume, then, the light, the only light in that cavern, caught his eye. He looked up, and in shock, his legs buckled. Bill fell back onto his

rear with a splash as he saw, above him, stretching up as far as he could see, the pile of children's things continued, but around the top, close to the edge of his vision, Bill could see bodies—and body parts—floating.

“That’s what he meant...we all float...” Bill muttered. There were boys and girls, teenagers, and little toddlers, and maybe even a baby up there. Beyond them, he could make out a grate, from which light illuminated the cavern, “That...that could be a way out. If everything else fails...” Bill tried to rationalize. He looked over the grate, then, he noticed that the draining water was roaring in his ears again. The music had stopped and as his eyes moved back to the stage, he saw the boat was gone.

“I...I need...I need the others...” Bill started to back away from the wagon and move toward one side of the cavern, but the only door he could see had a lock on it. Bill turned around and noticed that opposite the door was another grate, at just about his level. Bill glanced back at the stage, then started to run for it, splashing up water, but about two steps into the run, the music started again, this time thunderously loud, drowning out all other sounds. The song was no longer *Carousel*, but instead, *Pop-goes-the-weasel*, and Bill really didn’t want to find out what would come out when the song finished.

He reached the grate with enough time, however, and started to tug on it with all his might. Eventually, the metal began to creak, suggesting it might come lose, and Bill thought for a moment he might actually make it out. Then, the song slowed way down, just before the final pop. Bill turned around slowly and saw the wagon stage explode, the clown torpedoing out and landing right on top of the boy. He felt himself thrust down into the water. He tried to scream, but water filled his mouth, and he tried to hit and push the monstrous creature on top of him back. But to no avail. Bill struggled for a few moments more, then he started to feel lightheaded, and resigned to his fate, only to be pulled gruffly from the water and held in the air. Bill spat water and coughed hard, trying to get his breath back, then, he wiped water from his eyes to see Pennywise’s bright red lips and nose only inches from his face.

“Well, Billy boy, this is a new one, isn’t it. You and me...just us...no other Losers to worry about...” the clown spat out, letting out a long,

shrieking laugh, "The rat and the eagle and those other guardians can't save you now..." Bill spat out more water, then tried to look the creature in the face.

"You...killed him...I'm...not...afraid of you!" the clown rolled its eyes and grinned widely.

"Who told you to say that? The wolf? The hare? Sure...you say you aren't afraid," the clown sniffed him, then shrugged, "And maybe you aren't. I don't care. Because you will be afraid. You are always afraid Bill...of the deadlights!" the clown laughed and laughed uncontrollably, and Bill squirmed and struggled as the laughing mouth grew wider and wider. The teeth multiplied as the monster's lips broke open like some sort of snake or...something with mouth flaps...Soon, it was like a gaping hole, and three dim lights were visible in his throat; lights that became brighter and brighter until...

Until...nothing. Then, he was cascading. He was falling, faster than he'd ever fallen in his life, though where, and toward what, he had no idea. He couldn't even get a grip on where up and down were, all around him were tiny lights that he eventually assumed were stars, and, as he began to spin in his fall, he started to see glimpses of the clown's face, still laughing at him. The clown began yelling *Faster!* And Bill spun quicker and quicker. He wasn't nauseated though. He was just terrified. Everything in him told him it was over. He would die. There was no hope. If there was a time to be afraid...it was now.

Bill began to scream, the spinning distorting the sound, until he saw something. The end. Far in the distance was a barrier of some sort, a line that if he crossed, he would die. There was no going back from this, and he was done. Bill, feeling himself defeated, began to apologize in his mind: first to Georgie, for failing to get revenge against the clown. Next to Richie...for being such a horrible friend. Richie deserved better than him. At least the boy wouldn't have Bill around to torture him anymore. Then, Bill thought to apologize to Mike, Stan, Eddie, and Ben, then his parents, then...of course, Beverley...

*Beverley, say it...say their names...* Bill heard this voice though from no place he knew, and thought it had to be the clown, and ignored its orders. He went back to thinking up people to apologize to, maybe



Mike and Eddie's mothers and Stan's parents too. They didn't deserve what Bill had dragged their kids through. Richie's parents...well they might deserve it.

*Bill, think of them...say their names. Say the girl you love first...then the others...*" Bill heard it again, but it didn't come from the clown. It came from something else...something that was much older...and much kinder.

"B...b...b.." Bill struggled. He'd never stuttered a day in his life. What was happening now?

*Say it!*

"B...Beverley!" Bill felt himself slamming into something, stopping short, just short, in fact, of that barrier and the end. Bill started feel a gentle wave moving through him...as though he was riding in the ocean or...

"No! You're dead, you stupid turtle! What the fuck are you doing?" Bill heard this from a single source. He turned slowly and saw the clown, or better, the clown's face, floating in space. The thing's lips were twisted in an enraged snarl, and after a moment, an accusing finger leading to a white gloved, frilly hand appeared in space.

*I do not interfere unless summoned by the ritual of Chud. And that ritual has been undertaken...* Bill looked down and saw that he was now on something enormous. It was like a gigantic rounded surface, that ended at the far edges of Bill's vision. Right in front of him, he could see thin lines defining and forming tightly fitting hexagons on the ground...or whatever he was riding on. In fact, if Bill didn't know better, he would've thought he was on a giant turtle shell.

"No! He didn't...he couldn't...he's a human, and he's alone, his friends aren't here to help him, you lying sack of shit!" the clown spat, but it wasn't directed at Bill. It was now clear that the thing Bill was on was the target of the angry curses.

*I do not and have never lied...as the human knows...* Bill turned around, and saw that far ahead of him, a gargantuan head, with round black eyes, green scales and a beak rose up near him, and Bill, to his

disbelief, had been right. Or that he was insane. Because he was riding on the back of a sea turtle the size of a cruise ship...or maybe bigger...and even worse...that fucking turtle was talking to him! *The boy has great will and enormous love for his friends. And his friends have love for him. They all hoping he is safe. This...is the ritual of Chud...*

“Grr...fine. You don’t lie...But the Rat...the Rat lies. That stupid Rat is making the ritual happen, isn’t he...manipulating them into summoning you. Back from the dead, apparently...the stinking traitor! We had a deal! I get to kill that Losers!” the clown roared. Then the pointing hand opened and flew dramatically toward Bill, snatched him up and flung him away. Back, spinning toward the barrier. Bill screamed, again feeling his heart and mind filling with fear. But then...

*Say his name. Say the boy...the boy...you loved...* Bill heard it, then tried to look back at the turtle and suddenly could. He watched the turtle slide further and further away, then yelled out with all his might.

“Richie!” Bill cried. And then, he was back on the turtle’s back. The animal let out a low, rumbling roar, then dropped its front flippers, and Bill was thrust back against the shell as the turtle as suddenly soaring away from the barrier, up, toward the endless stars around him. In the far, far distance, Bill could see the milky way spreading out, and watched in awe and actually felt some thrill at riding a space-dwelling turtle, until a white, gloved and frilled hand grabbed his neck and pulled him off again, sending him cascading again toward that terrible barrier.

*Now, the brave one, whose skin marks him as different. The third one you loved...Call their names, one by one...and hope that they can help you...*

## 8. Into the Sewers

“Bill...” Mike muttered. He hesitated in place just a moment, then, like the other boys and Beverley before him, threw his bike against the track’s fence, and turned around to face the manhole. He was ready; he’d help save Bill. His captive bolt pistol was jammed in his jeans, and the ammunition to fire it wrapped around his shoulder. They’d have six shots with the thing. Which, with three needles of Eddie’s blood, four of Ben’s discus and 2 silver slugs, he hoped would be enough to kill the clown, but even if it wasn’t, Mike was feeling incredibly powerful with those five other Losers around him.

“Alright,” Ben started, opening his heavy track bag and pulling out a crowbar. He looked over his allies, then signaled to the manhole, “Let’s do it...Let’s go get Bill...” Ben jammed the bar into an opening on the sewer top and started to strain against it. But, the thing didn’t move. Ben seemed to be struggling, which led to him being joined by Richie, who looked really pained as the two pressed with all their might against the thing.

“Fucking clown is going to kill Bill because we can’t get the stupid man-hole open!” Richie spat out. Mike moved to help them, and found that the thing would not budge. He pressed, then Beverley pushed him aside and grabbed onto it as well. Still no luck. Ben let go and drew back, shaking his head.

“See...this is why I’d’ve preferred to scout it out...”

“What now?” Stan asked, “We can’t do anything if we can’t get into the sewers...and...Bill...”

“It’s probably the clown...doing some dark magic or...” Eddie was cut off by Richie throwing out a hand.

“Now wait just a fucking minute,” Richie grabbed the bar, threw his body weight against it. There was a slight clink of heavy metal against metal, “It’s just jammed. We can do it, it’s just going to take all of us...” Ben, rolling his eyes, moved Richie back and gripped it with all his force. Richie reached over him, grabbing the bar, then Beverley joined them. Mike stepped to Beverley’s side and pressed

into the bar, then, eventually, Eddie worked his way over, and with his unbroken arm, heaved against the bar too.

“St...Stan! We...need...you...” Mike called. Stan looked at Mike a moment, then moved slowly to Mike’s side and reached around him. He pushed against Mike and the bar, and Mike felt all of the Jewish boy’s pressing into his body. Including the crotch of the boy’s tight khaki shorts. A thought flashed through Mike’s mind he wasn’t proud of, and he was about to tell Stan to move to another spot, when the metal suddenly made a loud creaking noise and the manhole burst off, leading the Losers to tumble into each other. Except Stan, who stumbled right down through the manhole.

“Stan!” Mike yelled, as he saw the boy fall. He leaned down through the hole, drew his flashlight from the bag and tried to shine it down, then saw Stan, sitting, waist deep in some nasty looking water.

“Stan! I’m coming!” Mike yelled. He found the old, rusted ladder, and started down the steps, only to have one snap in half. Mike slipped himself, and fell hard into the water and the hard concrete below it. It only took him a moment to recover though, and soon, Mike was on his feet and reached down to pick up Stan. The boy’s clothes were splashed with water that looked gross, and he seemed shook, on the verge of crying. Mike stood him up, and saw he was gripping his bird book tightly. The book, unlike the boy, was dry, and Stan opened it, flipped a few pages, then closed it and looked at Mike.

“I thought...I was dead, Mike...and that this was ruined. I thought...that I’d been left...”

“You’re okay, Stan...” Mike said, gently pushing Stan’s curly hair back from his forehead. The Jewish boy seemed to blush slightly, then looked down at his wet khaki shorts and the nice pennyloafers Mike knew were now underwater, then back up at his friend.

“You’ll keep me safe...” Stan said, smiling slightly, “I shouldn’t worry...”

“You’re right...I won’t leave you down here...none of us will...” Mike said. Then, there was the sound of somebody trying and failing to sound like a stereotypical farmer.

“Well, now, I say, you shoulda wore youses bloody clothes, Eds. Might’a gotta clean in that mess, I say!” Richie roared.

“Shut up! Beep-beep!” Eddie yelled. Then Mike and Stan could see the small boy’s feet dangling through the hole, which was leading the small boy to scream, “Richie! What are you doing! Don’t just drop me! I can’t climb!” Mike shook his head, then moved with Stan to grab Eddie. The smaller boy fell onto Mike and knocked him back into the water with a splash. Stan stood them both up, trying to straighten Mike’s shirt, then, he saw Richie’s feet were dangling down. Mike and Stan, now with Eddie’s help too, pulled him down too, though Richie fell a little harder, and caused both Stan and Mike to stumble back. Richie kept his balance though, and stayed standing enough to grip Eddie in a hug.

“We’ve made it. Now we just have to rescue Bill and kill the fucker...”

“Hold on, Richie!” Beverley called. She came next, but, unlike the other two, she tried to use the old ladder. She moved carefully and got further than Mike, but again a step snapped, which led her to fall back and Mike and Richie to catch her. Mike looked up at Ben, who was looking down at the ladder. He put a foot on it, then, the entire metal structure collapsed, pieces falling back into the water and splashing all the Losers down there. Mike wiped his face off on his shirt, then saw Eddie’s shirt being used by Richie. He pushed past those two and looked up at Ben, who waved at him.

“Mike, come on up. I know where there is rope to tie down a way out, but I need someone else strong to get it...” Mike looked back at Richie, Eddie, Beverley and Stan. All of them looked at Mike, and probably thinking about the bigger boy’s weight, but, Richie just spat into his hands, rubbed them together, then grabbed Mike’s knees. Stan moved quickly to help him, and the two of them started to lift him up. Beverley pushed Mike from the rear, then, with a little extra shove from Eddie, they had the black boy up, high enough for Ben to grab his arms. Ben pulled him out, back up onto the dry, asphalt of the street.

“Okay...so there, next to the track, there is a shed, with rope...” Mike nodded, and the two of them ran over to the large, wooden, red and

light brown structure. Mike grabbed the doors and shook them, but saw a big lock.

“Do you have a key?”

“No, but I know the thing is eaten by termites and on the verge of breaking...” Ben pushed Mike back with a hand, then lifted his foot slowly, “We can kick it on three...One, two...” Mike, trying not to imagine who would ultimately be blamed for breaking into the shed, lifted his foot as well and readied himself.

“Three!” Both he and Ben yelled. With their combined force, they burst the door open. Mike could see that Ben was right, the wood was weak and the door flung out easily. They revealed a great deal of track and field equipment, including a nicely wrapped coil of rope. Ben snatched it up, then the two of them raced back to the manhole. Ben started to tie it around a pole on the trace fence, while Mike looked down to see the Losers.

“We’re coming, we’ve found it...” Mike heard the sound of tires screeching, and looked up just in time to see Henry Bowers fling the door open of his car and come stomping toward him, a bloody knife twirling in his hand. Mike glanced back at the car and nearly retched as he saw the unmoving corpses forms of Belch and Vic sitting in puddles of their own blood in the passenger and back seat.

“Fuck...”

“I told you to get lost, negro! But you didn’t listen. I told you to stay out of Derry!” Mike started to stumble back, then, Henry turned and stepped aside from a discus that came flying toward him, “Nice try, Hanscom. But let’s see your big boy arms stop this!” Henry growled, brandishing the switchblade. He jumped over the manhole and tackled Ben. Mike saw that Ben, thankfully, knocked the knife out of Henry’s hand, but the two continued to fight, pushing, shoving, shaking, and scratching, until Henry headbutted Ben, then bit the boy’s muscular arm. Ben yelled and Henry, jerking him with all his might, knocked Ben back into the sewer hole. He flew down screaming and made a splash, then Henry turned to Mike. Mike started to back away, and heard his name called by those down the manhole, especially Stan.

“You know...that slaughter house...one your farm...” Henry started to approach Mike slowly, a really crazed look in his eyes, “The one that burned down with your father in it. The whole town knew about the tragedy there...it was real sad, wasn’t it? The way it burned down. Too bad...that I couldn’t have burned it down myself, and taught you coloreds a lesson...to stay out of our...” Mike, who had enough, suddenly rushed forward and shoved Henry. The boy stumbled back and fell onto the ground, and Mike drew his captive bolt pistol and loaded it. He turned it to Henry’s head.

“You’re insane! And a murderer!” Mike roared, “Vic and Belch...and you want to kill us too? What the fuck?” Mike’s hesitation and thoughts gave Henry the opening he needed, and he quickly knocked the weapon aside and was in a flash on top of Mike.

“I killed them. I killed my father. And I’ll kill you too, negro...” Henry spat, then ripped the captive bolt pistol from Mike’s hands and raised it over his head. Mike began to whimper, and for a moment, he didn’t hear any other sound then Henry’s heavy breathing and the speedy beating of his heart. Then, Mike let out a deep sigh, and accepted that Henry would kill him. He hoped that the other Losers would be strong enough to beat the clown without him. He was the outsider after all, the seventh piece that didn’t seem to belong, but worked well enough to finish their puzzle. Mike looked Henry in the eye, he imagined his father would tell him to do something like that to his killer, but then, Mike heard a voice drown out all those thoughts. One screaming his name. Loud enough, that Mike started to feel much, much stronger.

“Mike! Mike! Mike!” Stan screamed at the top of his lungs, and Mike, now feeling like he had the advantage, looked up into Henry’s eyes for a different reason. The insane boy raised the pistol, then at the last second, Mike thrust a hand out and pushed the pistol away. And the bolt went right into Henry’s leg.

“Ahh! You stupid...stupid...ahh!” Henry fell back, blood gushing from where the bolt had struck him. He started to crawl away, and Mike stood up, picked up his weapon and with all his might, smacked Henry across the face with it. The hit was so hard that the boy was left knocked out, in a bloody heap. Mike then holstered the pistol, picked up Henry, and dragged him to his car. Mike flung the boy in,

right in the bloodied lap of Belch. The black boy looked at the grisly scene for a few seconds, then slammed the door shut, turned, and called back toward the manhole.

“I’m safe! I beat him! I’m coming down...” Mike yelled, smiling. Then, another name was called. One that sent Mike into a panic.

“Stan? Stan! Where’d you go?” Richie yelled.

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“Stan!” it was Mike screaming it, but the call was now distant, almost inaudible. Because, while one second, he was calling out for Mike as loud as he could, the next, he turned around and saw a black tunnel, only to turn again and find himself in sort of sewer hub that was not near the manhole. Stan gripped the bird book tightly in one hand, then drew his flashlight from his pocket and turned it on the darkness around him. It was some sort of center for workers: it was dry, and there were numerous handwheels, cranks and gears around him. There were also a few ladders that led up to different levels and a staircase that led down.

“Guys! Hey guys, where are you? Guys!” Stan called out, but there was no response. He suddenly felt something move behind him, and turned the flashlight.

“Bill! Bill, are you...?” Stan trailed off, as nothing responded. Then, Stan turned slightly, because he saw two horrible red lights appear to his side. Stan flipped the flashlight over, and revealed the clown, smiling widely, its gloved, frilled hands clasped together.

“Hello...” the horrible red lips whispered, “Come here, Stanny-boy!” Stan screamed, then threw the flashlight down and opened the bird book. But it was too dark to see. Stan was about to start yelling out birds he knew, when he felt a hand on his back. He turned to see an illuminated Mike standing behind him.

“Mike...thank god...I thought I...” Stan looked over that Mike, then saw something was wrong. It his eyes looked dazed, and his head turned slowly, almost like stuttering, almost...like it a doll’s head. Stan started to stumble back, beginning to whimper, “Mike...”



"I'll leave you for him, Stan..." Mike said, "I'll abandon you...let you die...fucking faggot ...but don't worry...and we'll still be together, you and me, when it kills me to...we'll float together forever...and you'll get what you really want..." Mike held out a hand, touched Stan's face, then shoved him back, "But first, queer boy, you should die...alone," Stan really began to whimper and whine, then Mike started to move away, or better, float away, and Stan threw out his hand.

"Mike, wait, Mike don't leave me!" Stan reached out, then tripped over his own flashlight and fell hard onto the ground. Stan, his hand scraped and starting to throb, lifted himself up slowly, and picked up the flashlight. The minute he turned it on though, he saw a horrible monster. The creature was that terrible, strange woman from his father's painting, but, instead of hands, she had bat's claws, and big, ripped wings opened up from her back. She screamed loudly, and Stan screamed as loud as he could, then...her huge horrible mouth was around his face.

Her form knocked him to the ground and he crashed hard. Her teeth were lodged around his head and her bat claws held down his hands. Then, he felt himself being...digested. He didn't know how else to describe it. It was like liquid was crashing against his face; he could barely breath, and the horrible teeth sunk deeper into his flesh. He thought for a moment she would shake him hard and break his neck, or press her mouth closed with enough for to crush his head in. Instead, the liquid keep coming and it felt like he was drowning on something horrible smelling that burned as it washed against his face. Stan was sure he was dead, but he couldn't accept it. Something in him was making him whine and scream and cry. Like his fear was being stoked while he was consumed. Including, his worst, worst fear. That he was abandoned. By his parents. By God. By the Losers. And worst, by Mike, who knew Stan's feelings about him, but didn't care. He was abandoned, which is what a faggot like him deserved. Stan started to struggle less, his fear was still deep but his body could no longer resist. And the other losers, Bill, Richie, Eddie, Beverly, Ben...Mike...they never wanted him in the group anyway.

"Stan! Stan! Get off him, you bastard!" Mike voice roared. Stan was suddenly brought back to reality, and opened his eyes into the dark

mouth of the monster. Except it wasn't dark. There was a dim light there, that started to draw him in, closer and closer...then, it let go. The mouth opened up, and Stan wiped the liquid from his face to see that there was a beam of light shining into the hub. His eyes followed it to find Mike at the other end, holding a flashlight up at the monster and looking furious, with his captive-bolt pistol in his other hand.

"Get the hell off of him!" Mike called angrily. The woman opened and closed her mouth slowly, probably savoring Stan's blood, then smiled widely.

"This is new...so much determination and power that you found him here...no matter. This will still be fun. Go ahead, Mikey boy, let out Aslan's roar..." the thing said coldly. Mike cried out and started running toward it, but the woman suddenly jumped back and shifted to become a no-descript, human form, a dark black color and without her wings. This caused Mike to stop suddenly, still holding his pistol. The woman...or thing, began to laugh wildly, then, it burst into flames, illuminating the room in a horrible glow. The creature lit two bright blue flames in the place of her eyes and a huge, roaring orange and red one where its mouth should have been. Mike's anger and bravery faltered, and Stan started to scoot toward him, and away from the burning creature.

"What's wrong, boy? You afraid of a little fire? Come here and meet the fate your father did...and you deserved!" the flaming creature took a long step toward the two boys, causing an explosion of flames where the foot landed. Mike lowered his flashlight and pistol and started to stumble back, but Stan, now clearly able to see, snatched up his bird book, and got in front of Mike.

"Oh...now the sissy boy has some courage...you'll burn too, boy. Or float, whichever you prefer..." the flaming creature roared. Stan looked the fiery thing in the eye, then, it was though Mike's courage and strength was now flowing through him. Maybe Mike was holding him. Maybe Mike was just touching him. Stan couldn't tell. But Stan knew exactly what he had to do as he flipped open the bird book to the exact page he knew he needed.

"Die!" the flaming creature suddenly rushed toward the boys, but

Stan yelled back as loud as he could.

“Golden Eagle!” Then...it was like he was in a dream. Because two giant, golden eagle wings, glimmering and out shining the pale, fiery light, spread out and surrounded them just as It approached. The flaming monster crashed into them, then, the wings flung out, sending It spinning away from the two. Stan raised his head, and the loudest eagle caw he’d ever heard thundered throughout the hub. Then, the creature’s fire was out, and it was stumbling back, away from the glimmering wings.

“No! No! No!” It called, then, the creature, now looking much more clownlike, began to stumble away, growling as it disappeared into a nearby tunnel. Stan watched it, then, the dream was over. The glimmering wings and the eagle were gone, and Stan was left standing in the dark sewer hub, holding open his bird book, only the sound of draining water around him. And, in a moment, he was suddenly overwhelmed by a flood of emotions, especially fear, which caused him to drop his book and fall onto the ground. The boy curled into a ball, ran his hands through his soaked, bloody and horrible liquid covered hair and began crying loudly. Mike was suddenly in front of the whining child, looking him over.

“Stan! Stan, are you okay? Did he... your...head...” Mike reached out to what Stan knew had to look like a bloody, ugly mess around his face, but the Jewish boy started to lose control of himself.

“No!” Stan yelled, flinging a hand out and slapping Mike’s fingers back, “No! You abandoned me! You left me! You left me to die! Because of what I am...” Stan yelled, now swinging his hands wildly. Mike watched for a moment, then snatched both of Stan’s wrists and pulled up closer to the boy.

“Stan! Look at me Stan! Look at me!” Stan let out a loud sob, but then his breathing began to slow, and he looked into Mike’s eyes, “I would never abandon you. Never. I will always be there for you, Stan. Always.”

“But...But you knew about...and you wanted to leave me...”

“You know I don’t want to leave you. You know I wouldn’t ever leave

you...it doesn't matter what you think I know..." Mike said. Stan looked Mike directly in his dark, brown eyes, and he felt himself calming down. Stan pulled his arms free and hugged Mike tightly, beginning to cry again. And Mike held him back, gripping the Jewish boy tightly.

"I love you, Mike."

"I love you too, Stan..."

## 9. Got a Voice?

“Well, this is going just swell...” Richie said grumpily, wiping his nose and hoisting his flashlight to reveal that in front him was... shocking enough...more sewer, “Let’s see, Henry Bowers nearly killed Ben there...then, he nearly kills our dear black brother Michael, but that tough old darkie took care of him. Of course, Stan just disappeared while that was happening and before we could even pause to smell how much shit we were wading through, Mike took off after him. Does he even know where Stan is? Does he have the slightest clue of where Stan went? Because I don’t. And now, I’m following you, Eddie, to...I guess Bill? Here, sloshing through piss and crap on our way to fight an evil, shape-shifting clown before it kills him!” Richie began to yell at the end of this, though Eddie turned around and flashed his light back in the boy’s face.

“Shut up, stop being racist and beep-beep.” Richie gave Eddie a ugly snarl, then looked back at Ben, who was clearly not at 100%. The muscular boy was limping, carrying a flashlight in his right hand and his heavy bag over that same shoulder. His other arm as Richie knew, was scratched up, maybe even broken from when Henry Bowers had shoved him into the manhole. Beverley was bringing up the rear behind him, though she seemed more interested in finding Bill than dealing with Richie and Eddie.

“Alright, Mr. Compass-in-liver, you know where we are?” Richie asked.

“I...well...I know where we have to go...” Eddie muttered. He opened his fanny pack and drew his inhaler, took a hit of it, then put it back.

“Wait, Eds, I thought that thing didn’t do anything? That it was just gazebo?”

“It’s placebo Richie. And I don’t care, it makes me feel better to have...like, the directions become clearer when I use it...” Eddie muttered, then stopped suddenly, causing Richie to bump into him, “Wait, this way...” Eddie turned to a hard right, moving through a muck that was starting to smell a little better. Richie followed,

turning his flashlight up and down around him, but finding no evidence that this one sewer pipe was different than any other.

“How...much...longer?” Ben called forward, huffing a bit. Richie glanced back at him to see that he was trying to adjust the heavy bag on his shoulder. Richie glanced from him to Eddie, who stopped suddenly again, then pointed.

“Here, it’s just down this path...” Eddie turned to the right again, and held out a hand. Richie pointed his flashlight down the path, but he could see that the small boy was right. There was a dim light in the distance, something that told him they were where they were supposed to be. Richie moved toward the light, no longer looking down but at the increasingly horrifying image in front of him. Richie was pretty sure he saw something like a body float past his view.

“What the fuck, guys...what in the fuck is that?” Richie kept moving toward...he wasn’t sure. A pile of kid’s stuff? With things floating around it. Like bodies.

“Richie wait!” Richie had started moving quicker, but Eddie grabbed a fistful of shirt just before he stepped off the edge of that pipe. Richie’s flashlight went flying from the sudden stop, and he got a good long glimpse down at a reservoir way below them. The water around their shoes was pouring down to it, and, maybe fifteen feet in front of them, was a stack of kid’s things, which, Richie could now see, was almost three stories high. Above them was a grate and the source of light, which was weakly illuminating the cavern around them. And, as Richie had feared, bodies, human bodies and some parts of bodies, were indeed floating around the pipe.

“Holy shit...” Richie let out. He was pushed aside by a frantic Beverley, who pointed down and screamed.

“Bill! There he is! Bill!” Richie followed Beverley’s directions to see the ugly plaid shirt and brownish red hair that he knew was Bill, floating just a short distance from the bottom of the pile of kids things. He was upright, though, and unlike the bodies around them up near the top, he didn’t quite seem dead, but he didn’t exactly seem alive either.

“You’re right! There he is...how do we get to him?” Richie looked down at the long, painful looking fall to the sewage tank below. He would’ve probably tried to jump, had Eddie not grabbed his arm and pulled him back.

“Wait! It’s not deep enough! Don’t jump!”

“Well then, what do you suggest?” Richie asked, “Where is your fucking compass leading us now, Eds?”

“Hey, I got you to Bill!” Eddie spat. Beverley, however, grabbed Richie’s other arm.

“Look there! I see a pipe that leads down to a small reservoir there. We can probably ride it down...”

“Like a hellish water park ride...” Eddie muttered. Beverley started to move back in the direction they came, but Eddie called to her, “Turn right up there, follow that path down. I think that leads to same the pipe...”

“Great job, Eds...great, fucking job,” Richie said sarcastically, putting an arm around the boy and leading him gruffly past Ben, who watched him with an eyebrow raised. They passed through another long path of bad smelling sewage, then, they ended up at the opening to the pipe. It was indeed a lot like a ride at a water park. Water was rushing through the tube, and splashing around the opening next to where they stood. The route forward as very dark, and, without his flashlight, Richie couldn’t tell where they’d end up.

“Are we really riding this...shit...to rescue Bill?” Richie asked, signaling to the brown water splashing around in front of them. Ben moved toward the opening, took a long whiff, then shook his head.

“I think this is mostly rain water...But, I can’t say for sure. It’s really dark...”

“It leads to Bill...I’m sure of it...” Eddie said. Beverley looked at him, then took his face in her hands and kissed his forehead. Eddie blushed slightly, then Beverley pulled her purse tight and with a big step, got into the pipe, and in a flash, had slid down, disappearing

into the darkness below. Richie could hear her scream dimly over the splashing water, then after a few moments, Beverley's voice rang up through the pipe, inaudible, though not as terrified. Ben, clearly taking this as a sign of safety, pulled his bag tight and cleared his throat.

"I'm coming Bill. And Bevie. I'm coming to protect you..." Ben said, though not really to either Richie nor Eddie. Then he slid into the pipe and followed the girl. His yell sounded through the tube too, then a splash followed, and Richie looked at Eddie.

"Ahem, are you ready to board the Richie express, wot wot and all that? We're opening up a water based travel ride, just for customers like you, Edward...wot wot..."

"Richie, why can't you just speak normal...Richie, what are you doing?" Richie picked up Eddie in a big sweep, then gently lowered him into the rushing water pipe. The smaller boy's good hand shot out and grabbed onto the edge of the pipe, while one of his feet stuck out to hold him on the opposite side as well. He was now staying in place, his rear getting splashed and washed over, "Richie, stop!" the boy demanded, "Get me out! Beep-beep!" Richie rubbed Eddie head roughly, then stepped into the pipe himself, lining up to ride down right behind Eddie.

"Awh, you want to wait for me to go down with you...I'm happy to oblige..."

"Richie, I swear..."

"Come on, Eddie, Bill isn't going to save himself..." Richie, now with his legs up around Eddie's body, smoothly slid one arm around the smaller boy's chest, then, used his other arm to knock Eddie's hand free, while at the same time kicking the boy's foot lose. The two went surging forward, careening down the dark pipe, both screaming as loud as they could, though likely for different reasons. The pipe was at a harsh slant, and Richie was getting a lot more momentum than he would've preferred...despite how fun the ride was...and that Eddie seemed on the verge of a heart attack.

"I'm gonna kill you Richie!"



"Guys! Duck!" Richie heard Ben yell over Eddie's cry, and he flung his head back, and missed a small hanging edge. The two boys slid on out of the pipe, sailing for a few seconds over open air before both crashed into the reservoir. The water was deep for a sewage pond, which was miraculous enough, then, Richie surfaced, and saw Eddie surface nearby as well. Richie turned to see Ben and Beverley were out of the water, sopping wet, and beyond them, Bill, floating a short distance away. They'd done it. They'd made it. It took Richie a few moments to recognize how intensely they were pointing at something at the pipe. Richie turned around to see that the hanging ledge he'd dodged wasn't a concrete ledge. It was the head of the clown. It was sitting on top of a pipe, and It turned to look directly at Richie, smiling widely.

"Look what I've caught, Richie...too bad isn't it? That you couldn't kill that son of a bitch yourself. You know you deserve to..." Richie glanced at the floating Bill, who really seemed to be out of it. The boy didn't react to anything around him, he was there, about six feet above the ground. Richie could also make out, vaguely, that his eyes were not their normal green color, but a light grey.

"Bill..." Richie muttered. Then, it all came back. The names. The insults. The hitting and the yelling. The way he was kicked out of the cabin, and the half-assed apology after.

"That son of a bitch deserves what he gets..." Richie grumbled. Eddie, who was getting out of the reservoir a short distance away, looked at Richie, then at the clown.

"Ahh! Richie watch out!"

"It's really too bad. Oh well, I'll make Bill suffer on your behalf...I promise Richie. Let's go float with him, shall we?" Richie only turned in time to see the clown jumped onto him, and in a moment, he was at the bottom of the reservoir. How, why, what he would do, he couldn't consider of any of it. The only thing he could see was the clown, which was standing on him, with a hand to his throat, and the only thing he could think about was the fact that he couldn't breathe in the water. Richie strained and pushed against the powerful hand, but to no avail. That was, until he suddenly took a deep breath. The clown's wild smile slipped to a frown, then he looked around.

“What? Where is it? Where’s the fucking fish?” the clown muttered. Richie breathed again, underwater, and heard what the clown said. How the fuck was he breathing underwater? Actually, Richie really didn’t care. He was being drowned by an evil, shape-shifting clown in a sewer. The only thing he wanted to do was get back to the surface and away from this thing. Richie started to squirm in It’s grip, trying not to think too much about everything happening. The world was upside down and fucking insane, but, he supposed he really didn’t care as long as he lived...as long as he and Eddie lived.

*Got a voice Richie? Give me form...* Richie looked back and forth in the water. He didn’t know where these words were coming from. It wasn’t clear, although it was now clear to him that he could see underwater. Richie was also getting the sense that whatever said the words in his head was not like the clown, but in fact, the clown’s enemy.

“Cheerio, my dear clown, I’d say, you seem to be suffering from a bloody spot of rumpled feathers and all that...” And, stupidly enough, Richie’s words actually resonated underwater, enough so that he could hear them as he spoke. His accent was, as expected, not that great, but the water he had somehow gained the ability to talk through seemed to be distorting the voice into a passably British tone. The clown didn’t seem to agree, as it tightened its grip on Richie’s neck, actually beginning to cut off...well, water from Richie’s lungs.

“That won’t work Richie...you’re going to die here, no matter what the fish tries to do...” Richie looked over the clown then summoned all the energy and air—err...water—he could to continue the accent.

“Give...my love...wot-wot...to all the people you’ve killed yes, once we’ve finished killing you, wot-wot...” Richie struggled out. Then... he couldn’t exactly describe what he was seeing. But a creature that he assumed was a fish, one of those really dark angler things with a light and big scary teeth, swam up from somewhere in the reservoir and clamped down onto the clown’s arm and started shaking him wildly, freeing Richie’s neck and letting him swim away. But, Richie didn’t get far before the clown’s other hand gripped his ankle and started to pull him back.

“Jasconius can’t save you, Richie...” the clown roared, its terrorizing voice booming through the water and actually hurting Richie’s ears. Then, he heard the words again. The words of the fish.

*Another voice. Give me another form. Help me...* the boy looked at the angler, then, took a deep breath of water and pointed to It angrily.

“Let go, I’z zay! Let go! Zurrender, clown monzter, wee-wee, or I shall zummon ze fish upon zou...” Richie changed to his French accent and ordered the clown back. In response, the angler fish ripped flesh loose from the clown and swam away into darkness, blood trailing behind it. After only a moment more, the creature returned, but, it wasn’t an angler anymore. It was a tiger shark, one of Richie’s favorite animals. And Richie knew that it was the same fish helping him. Something was telling him so.

The shark, in a flash, rushed the clown and started biting along the body, leaving long trails of blood spilling into the water, then it bit with all its might against the hand holding Richie, freeing him and letting the boy begin to float away. The shark, in a sudden move, dragged its teeth along the clown’s face, then turned and started to move swiftly up toward the surface, close enough for Richie to grab onto its dorsal fin. He thought for a moment, he might make it, but Richie’s ankle was snatched again and he was pulled back down off of his new shark friend. Richie glanced back to see that the clown’s right foot had reformed into some sort of distorted hand, and It let out a furious roar as the foot, gripping Richie’s leg, started to pull him.

“Why, darling,” Richie began, now using his greatest accent, Southern Bell Delilah, “You seem to be quite pushy about dragging me down to the floor with you. But, sweetie-pie, you seem to also be dealing with quite the little fishy problem, I’d say...yes, it’d be a real tragedy to have you hurt by such a thing...but it’d be a worse tragedy to let you live...” the shark turned to the clown, then, in front of Richie’s eyes, it grew, spread out and expanded until it was a gigantic creature, something Richie might’ve described as a sea serpent. The thing had a long, curling body covered in scales and with fins down its back and a snake-like head. The creature opened its mouth to reveal four enormous canines, and let out a thunderous roar in the clown’s direction.

The appearance of this dramatic and powerful creature was making Richie felt rather confident. He glanced again at the small, weird hand around hand-foot around his leg, and then smiled coolly at the monstrous clown then looked to the serpent now gliding through the water around him, "Go on now, you pretty fish-snake you. Go teach that awful clown a lesson for his own good, get him on, I say!" The serpent rubbed its large head against Richie's chest, making a noise almost like a purr as it touched him, then it torpedoed down to the clown. In a flash, it had wrapped its body around the clown's legs and waist, then it opened its great mouth and bit down into the clown's upper body.

"This isn't over, Richie! You'll pay, just like the others!" the clown roared, though it was tempered by the enormous mouth over its head. Richie was not concerned by this threat, however, and he instead watched with delight as the serpent made a quick jerking motion that ripped the clown's form in half. The hand-foot thing, no longer attached to the upper part of the body, simply fell away from Richie's leg, then the serpent released the remains and swam gracefully up toward the boy. Richie grabbed a passing fin and rode the serpent as it sped up to the surface of the water. Then, just as he broke through to air and dim sunlight, the dream was over.

Richie flew up out of the water and crashed onto the hard surface of sewer concrete, in a daze. He rolled on his back, groaning, his eyes, ears and mouth filled with liquid, and unable to register anything around him. Richie couldn't really see or sense anything, that is, until a small, shaking hand gripped his wrist.

"Richie!" Eddie called, though Richie heard it through a haze as water seemed to be spilling out of his ears. Then, Eddie repeated himself, and Richie's eyes suddenly opened. He sat up, and water flew from his mouth, right into the smaller boy's face. Richie looked him over for a moment, trying to comprehend what he had just been through, then sat up and coughed hard a few more times, spitting water everywhere around him, including all over Eddie. Then, he took a deep breath, and felt like air was in his lungs again. Which made Richie feel insane. He breathed underwater...

"Richie, are you okay?" Eddie asked. Richie nodded slowly, then with a hand on Eddie's good shoulder, he stood up slowly, registering that

he was back in the cavern. Ben and Beverley were a few steps behind them, and the giant pile of kids stuff was a little ways to his right. Richie also recognized that his clothes were sopping wet, his hair was spilling water down his face, and his shoes were like standing in a pond. But, by some miracle, his glasses were still on, and he reached out to grab Eddie's shirt and wiped them off with it, much to the smaller boys dismay.

"Richie! What are you doing?" Eddie groaned, trying to squirm out of the other boy's grip, "You were just dead and now you're being an ass..."

"I missed you too, Eds." Richie said, putting his glasses back on, then hugging Eddie gruffly. The smaller wriggled in his grip a moment more, then, he embraced it, throwing his good arm around Richie and putting his face into the older boy's shoulder.

"I...thought you were dead...You idiot...don't...don't leave me again..." Eddie sputtered out, his voice beginning to break.

"Awh...I didn't know you cared so much, my love," Richie said, planting a soggy kiss into Eddie's hair. The smaller boy let out a sob, then his grip on Richie's back became tighter.

"Richie..." Eddie took a deep breath, then leaned back and looked the bigger boy in the eye, "How...how did you survive?"

"You won't believe it, but a fish..." Richie was interrupted by Beverly stepping over to him, clearing her throat, then putting a hand on his shoulder. Eddie stepped back from Richie, then Beverley put her arms around the boy and hugged him tightly.

"I'm really glad you're alright, Richie..." Beverley said, then put a hand on his cheek, "But Bill still needs our help. Come on!" Beverley led the dripping Richie over to where Bill was floating. He was just beyond Ben's reach, as the bigger boy was stretching up as high as he could to grab him.

"What about Stan and Mike?" Richie asked, looking up at Bill. Beverley turned to Richie, then sighed.

"I don't know. I hope they're safe...But we need to help Bill! He's getting higher and further away..." Richie glanced up to see that indeed, Bill seemed to be rising. Richie watched him for a bit, then shook his head.

"This would be really easy if I still had my giant sea serpent ..."  
Richie scratched his chin, then turned to Eddie, who had an eyebrow raised.

"What, Richie? Sea serpent?" Eddie asked. Richie smiled and put an arm around the boy.

"There is another animal helping us. A fish! Probably married to your rat. You know, the universe meant us for each other..."

"Don't joke about that!" Eddie grunted, then looked down, "How did you get from fish to sea serpent?"

"It can transform, just as Isa can, hombre. Wesa gonna make the clown real hurtin' now..." Richie started with an offensive Mexican accent again. Eddie groaned at him.

"Richie, that sucks!" Eddie spat, "Stop...it..." the small boy trailed off, then pointed with his unbroken hand to a far side of the cavern. Richie followed his signal to see a pipe, jutting out into the chamber. The pipe was covered by a thick grate, but behind that grate, Mike and Stan were together trying to push it open. Eddie slapped Richie's arm, then called out to Ben and Beverley.

"Guys! Guys, look!"

"We've got to get that grate open! We need them here!" Richie yelled, grabbing Eddie's good hand and started to run to them, "The fish is telling me too! Can't you hear the rat, Eddie?"

"No, Richie! I can't!" Eddie yelled. The two arrived moments later, and Richie grabbed the grate and started to pull.

"Richie?" Stan asked, then looked him up and down, "Why are you so wet?"

"Underwater battle with fucking clown!" Richie yelled, tugging on

the grate, which was starting to creak. Eddie grabbed it with his good arm and pulled.

“We only got here by sliding down a pipe...” Eddie explained, then straining against the grate, “We’ve...found Bill...but he’s...too high up...”

“I see that...” Mike muttered, then pushed against the grate hard, “We...found...a dry...route. After we...fought the clown...too.”

“An eagle saved us...” Stan explained, then pushed on the grate as well, grumbling, “Wish it could open this thing for me...”

“I could use the sea monster for this too...” Richie agreed.

“They...whatever the animals are...don’t come whenever we want them, apparently...” Eddie surmised, “Otherwise, the poisonous rat would help open this too...” There was a loud creak as he said this, then Richie felt the grate starting to give.

“Or maybe we don’t need their help. Come on you two, pull!” Mike ordered. Richie was about to give him a piece of his mind, when he heard Beverley call out to him.

“Guys...” Beverley called. Richie turned to her, growling.

“You all could come help...” Richie started, then saw that Bill was really getting high up, way past what any of them could reach. They’d have to stand on each other’s shoulders to get him down now.

“Shit...” Richie muttered. Then, he heard another creak. He looked back to see Mike draw back, then grabbed and pulled Eddie out of the way in time as Mike slammed the grate open and knocked it to the ground, where it crashed with a loud clang. Mike jumped down from the pipe, then helped Stan get down. Stan glanced at Mike then moved forward and hugged both Richie and Eddie.

“I’m glad you’re safe...”

“You two Stanny-boy!” Richie said, slapping him on the back, then paused to look. Eddie hugged Stan as best he could with a good hand, then he turned to look up at Bill.

“What’s the plan?”

“Fly up there with an eagle...”

“Or summon a sea serpent to stretch up and...” Richie trailed off because it looked like they wouldn’t have a problem. Bill seemed to now be sinking, coming down toward them. Richie looked at Mike and Stan, then pointed.

“He needed us. The group...” Richie smiled, then remembered who they were saving. Hatred filled his heart, but it was weaker. Weaker than it had ever been. He’d save that son of a bitch, god-dammit. He’d man up and do it.

“Come on, if all of us are under him...he’ll slide down in no time...” Richie surmised, and led Mike, Stan and Eddie to Ben and Beverley, who were stretching up for the boy’s shoes, now fast approaching the group.



## 10. The Clown - First Form

“Almost! Almost Bevie...” Ben muttered. Beverley glanced at him, then up at Bill. It wasn’t that she didn’t like Ben. A lot. Or feel like she and he...could be partners. Lovers, maybe, in some world. But, Bill...something was really special about her and Bill...something...meant to be...

“I...got him!” Ben finally said, gripping a foot and pulling Bill down to the ground. He said this just as the other Losers, Mike, Stan, Richie and Eddie, pressed in behind her. Bill, though now on the ground, was still unmoving, his eyes a dim grey and his face nonresponsive to the world around him. Beverley looked him over, then reached out a hand to his face.

“Bill...come on...come back...” Beverley started, almost whispering the words to him, “I’m sorry...I’m sorry you got taken by the clown. But you have to come back...”

“Wait, Bevie, let me try...” Richie said, pushing past her. He touched Bill’s cheek, then drew back and slapped him hard. Richie was about to go for the backhand when all the other Loser’s grabbed at him and flung him back behind them.

“Stop Richie!”

“That won’t help!”

“You’ll hurt him!” Beverley rolled her eyes at the fool of a boy and turned back to Bill. He was still blankly facing forward, even with Richie’s hit. Then, she knew what she had to do.

“Bevie, maybe if we lay him down, we could...” Ben started, but was interrupted by Beverley grabbing Bill’s face and pulling him in for a long kiss. It felt so good, such a sweet, romantic moment, even if he was just a shell of himself, kissing Bill like this, completely embracing him, their lips slipping in and out of each other’s...it was something she had hoped to do for a long time. Then, the soft, unmoving lips of Bill began to press back against hers, and she opened her eyes to see Bill’s. Bill beautiful, green eyes. She pulled back, and Bill looked at

her, his face slipping into a wide, genuine smile.

“Beverley...”

“Bill...” Bill smiled at her for a moment more, then turned and looked around them, to Ben and Eddie and Mike and Stan and Richie. Even Richie.

“Guys...you came...all of you...”

“Of course we came...” Richie spat, crossing his arms, “We’re going to kill the fucking clown...”

“We came to save you too, Bill...” Mike said.

“Yeah...we all did...” Stan agreed.

“Including Richie...” Eddie continued, “He’s just acting grumpy because he didn’t get to kiss sleeping beauty...” Mike and Stan laughed at this, and Bill smiled at him, but Ben couldn’t stop looking at Beverley, maybe hurt by how she’d saved Bill, and Richie seemed personally offended by the comment.

“Shut up, Eds! Shut the fuck up!” Richie spat.

“No, all of you shut the fuck up!” Beverley turned with the rest of the Losers to where, under the giant pile of children’s toys, games, furniture etc., a circus wagon was starting to rumble and shake. The wagon was like a stage, and Beverley only really got to read the words, *Dancing Clown*, before the stage exploded in a burst of sound and smoke, then the clown jumped out, and landed a short distance in front of the group.

“This...is not how this time string was supposed to go!” the clown roared, then pointed angrily, “You’re suppose to be weaker, to be less unified, to care less for one another,” the clown pointed at Stan, Richie and Ben respectively for this, but Beverley didn’t know if that actually meant anything, “But you’ve proven just as annoying and meddlesome as every time I’ve fought you...” the clown’s left eye twitched slightly, then he turned to Bill, who stepped in front of Beverley. The boy’s fists were balled and he was clearly the leader of the group, “I see them. The guardians, they’re resonating off of you,

now that you're unified here to fight me...Maturin, Shadik, Garm, Aslan, Garuda, Jasconius...and you," the clown turned to Eddie and raised a finger, "You stupid rat. I see you Chunudra. You've created shadows of your guardians, channeled by these...humans...they are given form. You never intended me to win. Fine. But, if I kill these... Losers, as I've done before, your brothers die...." the clown let out a loud roar, then its hands slammed into the ground, except they were no longer hands, but big, sharp spikes, "And they will die!" Beverley, like the other Losers, drew back, but Bill put out a hand to them and pointed.

"You don't scare me you stupid clown! You killed me brother! And now...we're going to kill you!" Bill yelled. Beverley looked at the clown, then readied herself, "Ben, give him a discus, Mike, Eddie, get him with the pistol and the blood, Richie, Stan, give him cover to do it..." Bill grabbed Beverley's arm, and pointed behind the clown. There, just below the wagon were a baseball bat, and the remains of an iron fence. Pieces that could be used as a stake.

"Let's get some more weapons!" Bill said, but just as he said it, the clown fell, and seemed to disappear into the ground, then reanimated behind the group and flung all of them to the ground with a wide swing of one of its spikes. Then, Beverley saw Mike jump to his feet, and Ben behind him.

"Die, negro boy!" the clown cried, swinging a spike. Mike rolled out of the way, and then rushed the clown, and aimed the pistol, but his hands were grabbed and flung back just as the bolt shot out. Beverley could see that the clown now had a third hand coming out of his back. He used it to pick up Mike's wrists and in a quick move, flung the boy back into the pile of children's things. Then, with a horrible rip, a fourth hand appeared and caught Ben's discus, and the clown, smiling, twirled Its body and flung the discus back at Ben. The muscular boy only barely jumped out of the way in time.

"What do we do?" Richie asked, scooting away from It. Beverley could see that he was scooting toward Mike's fallen captive bolt pistol, however, and he nearly grabbed it when the rip happened again, and a fifth hand burst out, and stretched across the cavern to grab Richie's face, covering his mouth with the palm. He started trying to yell against the hand, which slammed him into the ground

and held him down. Beverley saw Eddie sit up as best he could, draw out a needle of his blood, but then, a sixth hand appeared, and this one knocked Eddie to the ground then hoisted him by the fanny pack, causing him to drop his needle. Eddie tried to open his pack for a second one, but the sixth hand deftly opened the lock, causing the boy and the fanny pack to fall. They hit the ground with a crash, and Beverley feared might've broke the needles. Then, Bill grabbed her arm and stood her up.

"The slugs, Bev! The slugs!" Then, the clown was behind Bill. It raised one of the spikes, but it bounced off a barrier that knocked the clown back. It turned to Stan who had his bird book out and was screaming off birds. The clown blew out a breath, then one of its hand drove into the ground and disappeared, then, the hand reappeared behind Mike, grabbing the boy by his shirt and flinging him back.

"Mike! No!" Stan yelled. He turned to that hand and raised his book, but he was facing away from the clown, which raised a spike and stabbed through his book, causing the Jewish boy to fall and leaving him...them—the Losers—defenseless.

"It's got us, It's got us pegged..." Ben muttered as he moved next to Beverley. She drew the slingshot and slug from her purse, but one of the clown's back feet turned into a hand, a hand with a sharp thumb that it very precisely used to cut the slingshot. The slug fell uselessly to the ground and Beverley looked down then back to the clown, which was now cackling wildly.

"Is that all you've got? The best the guardians can do? No wonder the Crimson King has destroyed so many of you..." the clown cackled again, then, he turned to Eddie, who was gripping his abdomen, and starting to scoot away.

"I'll make you pay...more than any of them, rat. You'll know what death is for us, endlessness, emptiness, formlessness!" the clown started to raise its appendages toward Eddie who cowered from the thing, then, Richie was standing beside Beverly, holding Eddie's destroyed pack. He unzipped it, and started splashing Eddie's blood onto the fallen slug. Then, Mike was beside her too, holding his captive-bolt pistol. He grabbed the slug, jammed it into the barrel,

then shoved it at Beverley, who took it, and aimed.

“Ben, give her cover!” Bill yelled. Except he was now standing opposite her, near the pile of children’s things, holding a big wooden baseball bat. He rushed the clown, which turned to face him, then the clown threw out two hands to block Ben’s discus. And Beverley had an opening. She rushed forward as fast as she could. Power was exuding off of her, and she took aim, and felt her guardian, whoever it was, make her aim, position, and angle true. Then, she fired. The bolt sent the slug sailing through the air, and the weapon went into the clown’s back and ripped out through Its chest, causing the thing to scream loudly...so loud, that it hurt the ears of most of the Losers. It was as though Its insides were torn apart by the slug, as black liquid snaked through its form, and Its body started to shine at several points, then burst in blood and light.

Beverley started to stumble back, to where Richie and Mike stood. Eddie scooted back toward her as well, until he bumped into Richie, who stepped in front of him and held out his hands. Stan ran quickly behind Mike, gently holding the remains of his book and trying not to look at the monster. Ben worked his way over to stand behind her, and finally, Bill moved in front of them, holding up his bat threateningly. The clown let out a few languished cries, then it turned and looked over the Losers, roaring in anger. Its body seemed damaged, badly, and it didn’t really seem able to move or fight in that form. Which probably explained the fact that it raised its arms, now seven of them, including a foot, and with fingers shaking like they were guiding puppets, seven human bodies were created in front of the creature. Each seemed to be corrupted forms of humans, but, as they raised their heads, the Losers recognized them.